THE MINISTER OF CHRIST

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OR

ASCETICAL NOTES AND REFLECTIONS
FOR PRIESTS

BY THE

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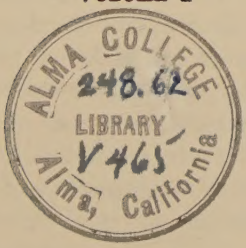
TITULAR BISHOP OF SEBASTOPOLIS AND AUXILIARY BISHOP
OF SALFORD

VOLUME I



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EDITOR'S PREFACE

THERE is a pathetic note in the appeal of all posthumous works. This note is emphasized when it is known that the writer was consciously addressing a last message to his readers, dealing with eternity and penned on the very brink of the grave.

Such were the circumstances under which the latter part of the present work was written. When, in its final chapter, the venerable author declared "Sto ad litus æternitatis" (I stand on the shore of eternity), he was indulging in no mere figure of speech. Many months before writing these words, he had become so convinced of the imminence of his death that he considered the discontinuation of this work in order to devote the remainder of his days to preparation for eternity. When he, nevertheless, decided to resume it, he was probably moved by the thought that he could thus make even his final solemn reflections of service to his brethren in their own preparation for that dread hour when all must face the great issue of issues. This thought would be a strong incentive to one whose whole life was devoted to labor for the sanctification of self and of his fellow-men.

John Stephen Vaughan was the last survivor of one of the most distinguished families in modern Catholic history. Of the eight sons in this model family, six

embraced the priesthood; all five daughters became nuns. Herbert, the eldest, died as Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster; Roger Bede became Archbishop of Sydney, Australia; Jerome was the first Prior of the Benedictine Abbey of Fort Augustus, Scotland; Bernard became a Jesuit and won celebrity by his public attacks on the vices of society and by the number of his converts, while Kenelm was a saintly and zealous missionary in the South of England.

Born in 1853, John Stephen received his education at the Benedictine Colleges of Downside and Monte Cassino, at the English College in Rome, and finally at the Grand Seminaire of Bruges. By a special dispensation he was ordained at the age of twenty-three by his brother, Herbert, then Bishop of Salford. For some years after his ordination he taught at St. Bede's College, Manchester, to which he was to return later as rector. Ordered to the South of England because of failing health, he labored with his brother, Kenelm, in the House of Expiation at Chelsea. As, however, his health showed no improvement, his physician prescribed a complete change of climate, and he then sailed for Australia, where he spent several years as a missionary under his brother, the Archbishop of Sydney.

Returning to England in greatly improved health, he entered upon the most active epoch of his life. With Msgr. Grosch and Canon Moyes he organized in 1892 the "Evidence Lectures," enlisting the coöperation of leading preachers and speakers (lay and clerical) of the day. These Lectures initiated a public movement

for the conversion of England, by expounding in the parks and public places of London the principles of the Catholic Faith. In 1896 Father John was created a Domestic Prelate by Pope Leo XIII, and two years later he was made a Canon of Westminster.

He had by that time become a highly esteemed preacher, lecturer and writer, and was frequently called upon to give retreats to the clergy and religious throughout Great Britain and Ireland. He also accepted several calls to the United States and Canada to deliver courses of sermons there. In 1909 he was chosen Auxiliary to Bishop Casartelli of Salford, acting at the same time as Rector of St. Bede's. Failing health forced a temporary resignation in 1912, but he returned some years later, took charge of the parish of Our Lady and St. Hubert's in Great Harwood, and resumed his duties as Auxiliary Bishop. When Bishop Casartelli died in January, 1925, the whole administration of the diocese was thrown on his shoulders, and, as his health was already undermined, this extra burden undoubtedly hastened his death, which took place in December of the same year.

Thirty years ago, Msgr. Vaughan and his brothers, Father Bernard and the Cardinal, were known in England as the "Trinity of Thought, Word and Deed". While this characterization should not be taken too literally, a substantial element of truth underlay it. Shy and diffident in public, Bishop John lacked the aggressive personality that enabled the Cardinal to do such marvelous work for the reorganization of the

Church in England, and that lent such a wide emotional appeal to the preaching of the famous Jesuit. This shyness and diffidence, however, was based on his outstanding and most beautiful characteristic—a profound humility and otherworldiness that impressed all who knew him. His thought was so concentrated on spiritual things that he was all but lost in the common affairs of men. For him the spiritual alone had true reality, and this characteristic is reflected in all his writings. In the life and words of our Saviour and the traditional teaching of the Church he found an ample storehouse wherefrom to draw his subjects. Several of his works had a wide circulation, and were translated into a number of foreign languages. Besides his volumes of sermons, perhaps the most treasured of his long list of earlier writings were his collected essays, published under the title of "Thoughts for all Times" and "Faith and Folly".

In the present work, his last, Bishop Vaughan addresses himself to his brethren in the Sacred Ministry, and he bequeathes to them in its chapters the wisdom and counsel based upon the fruits of a long and saintly life spent in the zealous service of God and of mankind.

We offer it in the confidence that it will be found what its distinguished author desired it to be—a source of edification and inspiration for priests. It was not given to him to see the work published. He was engaged on its final revision when he was called to his reward. R. I. P.

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THE MINISTER OF CHRIST

CHAPTER I

THE NEED OF SANCTITY IN A PRIEST

"You shall be holy, for I am holy" (I Peter, i. 16).

WHEN we think what eternity is, and strive to realize on the one hand its countless ages and its endless duration, and on the other what a soul in eternity means, it does indeed seem strange that God should make a soul's *eternal* condition of supreme pleasure or of supreme misery absolutely dependent on the brief and uncertain moment of the present life. What a slender basis for such a colossal edifice! But what is perhaps more wonderful still, is that the eternal destiny of an immortal soul should be entrusted to one so weak and so fickle and so vacillating as myself; that, in a word, I should have received the power to make or to mar my endless life

beyond the grave. Did I really realize the full extent of my responsibility, it would probably be far more than I could stand, and would drive me mad. But, though only half realized, the responsibility is there just the same, and every day and hour, as it comes and goes, is in very truth effecting some change in that eternal future life which will one day be mine. In fact, every conscious act or desire or thought bears a real and distinct relation to eternity, and helps in some measure to modify my future state. For, although we may seldom or never advert to it, yet we are in sober truth the real fashioners of our destiny, the framers of our future lot, and the arbiters of our eternal fate. From this fact we may justly conclude that there is nothing so trifling or so insignificant that we may not turn to account and draw merit from, even though it be but such daily necessities as eating and drinking. In the words of the Apostle, "whether you eat or drink, or whatsoever else you do, do *all* to the glory of God."

Hence, we should see in each day as it dawns a special gift from God, every moment of which may be rendered meritorious, if consecrated to His service. For it must be ever borne in mind that time is the raw material out of which the

rewards of eternity are woven, that the present is the seed of the future, and that whatsoever we sow in *this* world, we shall reap in the *next*.

Now, to bear these solemn truths constantly in mind, and to carry out in practice St. Paul's admonition: "Do *all* to the glory of God," is in very truth to aim at sanctity; for, as Dr. Challoner so quaintly but so truly says, "sanctity consists, not in doing extraordinary things, but in doing ordinary things extraordinarily well." Before applying these thoughts particularly to priests, let us consider that God is so infinitely good and generous that He bestows even His greatest gifts with no parsimonious hand, but scatters them broadcast in the most lavish abundance. Of all these gifts the greatest is sanctity. Indeed, we may truly say that there is nothing so precious, nothing so desirable, nothing of such inestimable worth in the whole world. It is the pearl of great price, spoken of in the Gospel, for which the wise merchant sold all he had, in order to be able to purchase it. It is that supernatural wisdom of which Solomon speaks when he says: "All good things come to me together with her, and innumerable riches through her hands; she is an infinite treasure to men, and they that use her become the friends of God" (Wis., vii. 11, 14).

God offers this inconceivably precious gift of sanctity to every Christian. He was addressing no specially favored class, but the human race at large, when He said: "Be ye holy, as your heavenly Father is holy." And so also was the Apostle, St. Paul, when he cried out: "This is the will of God, your sanctification" (I Thess., iv. 3). Yes, wonderful to relate, we are *all,* without exception, invited to aim at sanctity, so that there is no one who might not become a saint, if he were really in earnest and ready to pay the price. This is abundantly proved by the fact that there have actually been saints and great saints and canonized saints in every condition and walk of life, from the very highest to the very lowest—from great kings and queens like King Edward of England, King Louis of France, Queen Margaret of Scotland, seated on the dizzy elevation of a throne, right down to ordinary daily laborers such as St. Isidore, who worked on a farm, and even beggars, such as St. Benedict Joseph Labre, who, clothed in rags and tatters, begged his bread from door to door, and lived and died in abject worldly poverty, though rich beyond measure of course in the only riches that endure.

There can be no doubt whatsoever that the unknown saints far outnumber the known or

canonized saints. For one whom God desires to set before the world as an example, and to whom He therefore calls attention by wonders and miracles and extraordinary signs, there must be tens of thousands who remain hidden and unknown except to God alone. And it is such hidden sanctity that we must aim at. Signs and wonders and prodigies—such as we read of in the lives of the canonized saints—form no part of the essence of sanctity, which is all that we should feel any interest in. Indeed, such uncommon manifestations should be carefully avoided and never sought after, as they would seriously endanger our humility, and very likely stir up pride, self-complacency and other detestable vices, which might rob us of what little virtue we already possess.

But, though *every* Christian is called to perfection—though the admonition: "Be ye perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect," is addressed to every follower of Christ—not all are called either so peremptorily or to an equally high degree of perfection. In this respect, the priest occupies a very enviable position. Once it be granted that an individual has received a true call to the priesthood, we know that he has also, and at the same time, received a true call to a higher degree of sanctity than

has been received by the ordinary man of the world. And, because he has been *called* to a higher degree of holiness, it follows that he will receive from God more abundant graces and every other help necessary for its attainment.

Why is greater sanctity expected and required in a priest than in others? Why is he under a greater and a more solemn obligation to aim at sanctity than those who are not priests? This is a reasonable question and an important as well as a practical one, yet it is a very easy one to answer.

So soon as a man accepts the position and the responsibilities of a priest, he likewise takes upon himself the obligation of aiming at sanctity. Let us consider some of the chief proofs.

I. In the first place, a priest's position requires it. A priest is "another Christ" (*alter Christus*). He takes the place of Christ Himself in this world. He must exhibit in himself the virtues of Christ and the life of Christ. A well-known writer observes: "Of all faithful souls, it is safe to say that they must produce in one way or another the likeness of their divine Lord. If no feature of that likeness is to be found on a human soul, it can surely be none of His. But if this be in its measure true

of the humblest disciple of Jesus Christ, much more may it be asserted of those great servants of God who stand as lights of the Church. In the meekness of St. Francis de Sales, in the charity of St. Vincent de Paul, in the wonderful conformity with the Sacred Passion exhibited by the Saint of Assisi, and in the thirst for the salvation of souls which formed the noble passion of St. Catherine of Siena, what do we see but reflections of the divine Exemplar in one or other of the perfections of His adorable Humanity."[1] Now priests are especially elected by our Lord to be "the light of the world" and "the salt of the earth." Therefore, they, beyond others, should, as St. Paul expresses it, "put on Christ"; that is to say, clothe themselves with His virtues and adorn themselves with His benignity, mildness, gentleness and charity. As they are called upon to do the work of Christ and to walk in His footsteps, so they should be perfect in every virtue, and spread about them the "sweet odor of Christ." When addressing the disciples our Lord said: "As the Father hath sent Me, I also send you." Hence, we priests have to do what He did, and are expected, according to the measure of our weakness, to win souls by the same means—that

[1] A. T. Drane, "History of St. Dominic," p. 255.

is to say, by the force of our good example, our charity and our zeal. Hence it follows, as Cardinal Manning says: "There is no degree of sanctity or perfection to which a priest ought not to aspire. To aim at any mark or measure below the highest, is to fall short of our vocation."

II. In the second place, we priests are under a serious obligation to aim at sanctity more than others, because we are expected to be living examples to our flock. Every priest should so conduct himself and should so live as to be able to exclaim with the great St. Paul: "I beseech you, be ye followers of me, as I also am of Christ" (I Cor., iv. 16). Even a moment's reflection will suffice to convince us that, before we can reasonably issue such an invitation to the members of our flock, we must have advanced considerably in the imitation of our divine Master, and that we must have become, in some sense, "other Christs."

III. In the third place, we must be holy, because, as priests, we are placed amid our flocks, in order that we may point out to them the way to heaven, and in order that we may teach them how they should "walk before God, and be perfect" (Gen., xvii. 1). But how can we teach to any purpose, unless we are at least *aiming* at

perfection ourselves? The task committed to us is not only the most important and the most urgent and serious, but it is also the most arduous and the most delicate. If we have but little regard or interest in our own sanctification, how shall we excite within ourselves any strong interest in the sanctification of the souls committed to our care? If we will take no trouble to advance in virtue ourselves, what amount of trouble are we likely to take to spur on others, and to encourage them in their warfare with the devil, the world and the flesh? Give ear to the practical and persuasive words of the great St. Gregory of Nazianzus, who says: "We must first be purified, and *then* purify others; we must first be filled with wisdom, and *then* make others wise; we must be all alight ourselves, and *then* we shall be able to give light to others; we must first be near to God ourselves, and *then* we may lead others to Him; in short, we must be sanctified ourselves first, before we are in a position to sanctify others." Surely this is according to reason and common sense! If we are priests, let us see to it.

In order that we may be able, as in duty bound, to lead others along the paths of spiritual perfection, it is essential that we ourselves should be familiar with the route, and that we

should know, by actual experience, the wondrous ways of divine love. The reason why the saints were not only such zealous but also such successful missionaries and teachers, is because they were themselves consumed with the love of God. Just because they appreciated the value of grace above all else, and were ready to make any sacrifice in order to increase it in themselves, they fully realized the importance of increasing it in others. Loving God as they did with all their hearts and souls, they burned with the most vehement desire to set on fire the hearts of all under their charge. They labored most assiduously to win souls to God, and did all they could to increase the number of His faithful servants, because of their own intense love of Him. In fact, priests, who have been chosen by God Himself for the grandest and the highest of all possible missionary enterprises—namely, to coöperate with His divine Son, Jesus Christ, in the salvation of the world, so that St. Jerome speaks of them as "salvatores mundi"—ought to fit themselves for the sublime task by the highest sanctity possible. Their whole lives should be like those of St. Charles Borromeo, St. Francis Borgia, St. Louis of France, St. Philip Neri, and the rest of the saints whom we now venerate on our altars. Yes, we must

be assured with all possible certainty that our virtue, holiness and perfection ought in no degree to fall short of theirs; for they did no good thing which they were not bound in justice or charity to do, and to be a saint simply means to perform every duty perfectly and to act in all things according to the requirements of perfect reason.

This truth is well expressed in many passages of Holy Scripture where holiness is called justice (that is to say, the discharge of our duties), especially in that great admonition which our Lord gives us by the lips of St. Luke: "When you shall have done all the things which are commanded you, say: 'We are unprofitable servants, we have done that which we ought to do'" (Luke, xvii. 10). If then we are to become fit and really useful instruments in the hands of God for the salvation of souls, there is no doubt but that we must be pure and holy in His sight. "Be ye clean, you that carry the vessels of the Lord" (Is., lii. 11). A priest will be of greater or lesser use in the work of the ministry according to his nearness to Jesus Christ, the boundless source of all virtue. And this is only another way of saying that his usefulness will be according to the measure of his sanctity, or, to express the same truth in the

words of St. Augustine (*De Civitate Dei*) : "The sum of a priest's value is his holiness." There we have the whole matter in a nut-shell! Let us ponder over those words and take them to heart.

CHAPTER II

SANCTITY IN A PRIEST

"Be ye therefore perfect, as also your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt., v. 48).

ALTHOUGH sanctity is the most precious gift of God and a far greater treasure than words can express or thought realize, yet God, in His infinite goodness and generosity, offers it to all His children. There is not one of us who could not become a saint, if only he has the persevering will and the courage to really do his best. But a priest is in an altogether different position. He is not only invited to be holy; he is under a serious obligation to sanctify his soul. This obligation, indeed, is so pressing and so essential that he has no business to offer himself as a candidate for Holy Orders, unless he has fully made up his mind to aim at perfection, and to do all that he can to acquire it. "Be ye perfect" (*Estote perfecti*).

We have already, in the preceding chapter, mentioned three strong reasons why the priest

should strive to sanctify himself. Yet, there is one, not yet mentioned, of still greater weight, which he will do well to consider with all seriousness. It arises from the very functions which he has to perform. In the first place, he has to offer up the adorable Sacrifice of the Mass. Now to appreciate the Mass, it is necessary to appreciate the infinite sanctity, the infinite majesty, and the infinite dignity of God. The highest of the angels bow down and veil their faces before Him in heaven. In His dread presence, the most exalted of the saints are not pure. To approach Him except with a sinless heart and with hands undefiled, is unworthy of any Christian. Yet the very functions of the priest bring him constantly into the nearest relationship and into the closest intimacy with Him. Try and form some image of that Infinite Being who created the heavens and the earth by a single word, and who sustains all creation by the might of His power, and without whose authority nothing can move on earth, in hell, or in heaven. Just picture Him to yourself as the joy of the angels, the "reward exceeding great" of the glorious saints above, and as both the center and the circumference of all that ever was, or is, or ever shall be. In spirit, look upon Him, dwelling in the highest heavens,

the infinitely holy, and the perennial source of all holiness in others. Consider that, if there be any holiness on earth, it is but a tiny drop, as it were, let fall from that boundless Ocean of holiness, which is God; that, if there be any holiness among the Cherubim and the Seraphim and the other angels of heaven, it is but one insignificant ray let fall from the eternal Sun of justice, which is God Himself.

Then, with your mind filled with the most vivid sense of His infinite and wholly incommunicable perfection, take your stand at the altar, and think what it is that you do, when you pronounce the five short words: "Hoc est enim Corpus Meum." Watch, in imagination, the heavens open. Contemplate Him whom your words call down upon the altar before you. See Him in all His glory and indescribable splendor, resting between the fingers of your consecrated hands. Not even the greatest saint, not even the most Immaculate Mother herself is really, and in the full sense of the word, worthy to receive the Divine Food—God Incarnate—into her heart. And the poor, imperfect priest, stained perhaps with many faults of frailty, is nevertheless authorized to administer at the altar and to offer the adorable Sacrifice of the Mass. If it is impossible for him to be

in the strict sense worthy, surely he should be as worthy as his own earnest efforts, aided by divine grace, can make him! In any case, his conscience should tell him that he is bound to make himself—if not absolutely worthy, which is impossible—at least as little unworthy as possible. Though it stands to reason that we can never hope to be adequately fit for such a tremendous favor, yet we should surely feel that we are under the strictest obligation to purify ourselves to the utmost of our power and to adorn our souls with every virtue.

If we doubt this obligation, it must be either because we do not at all appreciate the infinite majesty of God, or else because we have no vivid faith in the tremendous power that God's love and condescension has placed in our hands. We are such children of sense that we find it exceedingly difficult to realize what the Mass really means. God hides Himself so completely, and gives no sign. There is nothing that appeals to our senses, or that can of itself arouse our attention, so that, if we do not reflect, we soon lose sight of the reality and forget the unspeakably sublime act upon which we are engaged. Of course, we have faith, but our faith is but too often dead, dull, and inappreciative. We do not meditate. We do not

seriously reflect. When God spoke to Moses from a bush in the desert, the Prophet's attention was arrested, because he saw that the bush was on fire, and because, when he ventured to approach, he actually heard a voice, saying: "Come not nigh hither! Put off the shoes from thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground" (Exod., iii. 5).

But the priest saying Mass sees nothing and hears nothing to attract his attention. He may be most unworthy to offer up the Holy Sacrifice; he may even be in mortal sin, and committing a most horrible sacrilege. But, even so, he hears no supernatural voice. God does not openly address him, and cry: "Come not hither! Put off the sins from thy soul, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground." God suffers the indignity, but makes no sign. Consequently, the delinquent is not aroused from his unhappy state, and utterly fails to recognize his deplorable condition.

So again we read in the Old Testament how Oza was instantly punished for his want of reverence towards the Ark. Because he dared to "put forth his hand to the ark of God," and took hold of it, he was struck by God for his rashness; and he died there and then, before the Ark (II Kings, vi. 7). These terrifying

manifestations of God's presence were constantly happening under the Old Law, but under the New Dispensation God does not arouse our faith by such visible manifestations of His anger. If every careless priest who dared to approach the altar unworthily were struck dead by the hand of God, we should undoubtedly find more earnestness among us, and a far greater desire to sanctify ourselves before venturing to clothe ourselves with the sacrificial vestments, and before offering up the unbloody Sacrifice, wherein Jesus Himself is both priest and victim.

Many even of the canonized saints have positively refused the priesthood, as being altogether unworthy of so stupendous a dignity. Many, like St. Benedict, St. Francis and others, so dreaded the responsibility and so deeply appreciated the great sanctity needed to perform the sacred functions properly that they shrank from an honor which they esteemed beyond every other, but of which they considered themselves utterly unworthy. Would to God that we possessed a little of their faith and humility! Would to God that we who are priests realized our position more clearly, and the immense sanctity that it requires! Listen to the words of the great St. Chrysostom, speaking on this very subject ("On the Priesthood," III, iv): "Though

the office of the priesthood is exercised upon earth, yet it ranks among things that are heavenly, and with good reason. For it was neither an angel nor an archangel, nor any other created power, but the Paraclete Himself that established that ministry, and commanded that men, yet abiding in the flesh, should imitate the functions of angels. Wherefore, it behooves the priest to be as pure as if he stood in heaven itself, among those Powers."

The following words of the late Right Reverend Dr. Moriarty, Bishop of Kerry, are also much to the point ("Allocutions to the Clergy," pp. 227–228): "On our ordination day, the Bishop placed the chalice and paten, containing the bread and the wine, into our freshly consecrated hands, and he said to us: 'Accipe potestatem offerre Sacrificium Deo.' We then received the power of working that stupendous miracle, by which these material elements are changed into the Body and Blood of Christ, and by which the eternal Son of God is made really present on our altars, and by which 'manibus nostris, velut in utero Virginis, Filius Dei incarnatur.'

"We receive the power of renewing the Sacrifice of Calvary, of offering to God the price of the world's redemption. We do what Mary

did. We give to the world Jesus Christ, the Saviour. We do what Jesus did, for we are identified with Him in this act by which He worked the salvation of man. We personate Him, and we do the very thing which He did at the Last Supper, and what He did, after another manner, the next day on the Cross. No miracle ever worked by man can be compared to this. No action of God, external to Himself, not even the creation of the world, can be compared to it! It raises us to a certain participation in the Divine Paternity. Oh! *quam magnum et venerabile est officium sacerdotis!*"

Bishop Moriarity goes on to say: "The offering of the Holy Sacrifice not only requires the state of grace, it likewise furnishes the great argument for demanding in the priest the practice of perfection. . . . It requires from us angelic purity of soul. 'Estote nitidi, mundi, casti, sicut decet ministros Christi et dispensatores mysteriorum Dei,' were the words addressed to us on the day of our ordination, and we should often ask ourselves how far we give heed to them."

So exalted and so sublime, and at the same time so sacred and divine is the priest's intercourse with God in the Mass that a greater degree of sanctity is demanded of the priest than

even of the religious, unless of course the latter too be a priest. As such a strong statement may not be readily accepted by my religious readers, who may think me prejudiced, I will not ask them to accept my words, but will quote from one who was himself a true monk as well as a bishop. I mean the late Right Reverend Bishop Ullathorne, of the Order of St. Benedict. He writes ("Ecclesiastical Discourses," pp. 136, 140–141): "In earlier ages, the priest was held up as a model to the monk, as belonging to the higher order of sanctity of the two. We have examples of this teaching in the Dionysian Book on the Ecclesiastical Hierarchy, in the writings of St. Jerome, of St. John Chrysostom, of St. Isidore of Pelusium, and of other Fathers. The holiest saints of the monastic life shrank from accepting the priesthood with an unspeakable reverence and fear. They saw in it a dignity so divine and an office so holy as to exceed the strength of men and of angels. *They dared not think that they could reach a sanctity commensurate with its responsibility.* . . .

"In his *Summa* of Theology, the Angelic Doctor thus concludes: 'If a religious man be not in orders, it is clear that the dignity of the cleric surpasses that of the religious, because

his order exalts him to those nobler ministrations in which Christ Himself is served at the altar, and for this a greater interior sanctity is required than the religious state requires. . . . Wherefore, all things else being equal, if he who is in sacred orders does anything against sanctity, he sins more grievously than even a religious who is not in sacred orders, even though the religious be bound to regular observance, to which he who is in sacred orders is not bound' " (cfr. *Summa*, II–II, Q. clxxxiv, a. 8).

In so far as the Holy Mass is concerned, we may truly say that the demand upon the priest to be holy arises, in the *first* place, from the purity, the sanctity, and the excelling dignity of the Sacrifice. It arises, in the *second* place, from the fact that the priest offers it as the representative of Christ (HOC EST ENIM CORPUS MEUM), and in the name of the Church, which is His body. A *third* reason is that he represents Christ to the people, and is to them the channel of His light and grace, and that he has received power over the mystical body of Christ, which is the faithful, as well as over His real Body and Blood, which is the Holy Eucharist.

Of the many hundreds of thousands of priests scattered throughout the world, there are, no

doubt, many who are cold, lethargic, and even unworthy. It becomes a practical question, therefore, to inquire into the cause of this. Speaking generally, let us ask what is the chief reason of the difference which we find between the fervent and zealous, on the one hand, and the careless and indifferent, on the other. They all believe and accept the doctrine itself; so the reason is not there. No; we take it that the difference lies in the degree in which the doctrine is realized. It is one thing to believe; it is a totally different thing to realize. And many do but half realize all that the Holy Mass really means.

If we wish to say Mass worthily, and to sanctify ourselves by this daily intercourse with the infinitely Holy, it is most important that we take pains to realize vividly the privilege and the extraordinary honor conferred upon us. There is no one who could possibly remain cold and irresponsive, did he fully and rightly esteem the tremendous favor bestowed upon him whenever he offers up the adorable Sacrifice.

A priest should make the Mass a special and a frequent subject of serious meditation. He should love to dwell upon the great attributes of God—upon His majesty, His power, His wisdom, and His infinite sanctity. He should

realize that He who made him, and who has adopted him as a son, comes down from heaven into his very hands; that He treats him with the greatest familiarity, and bestows upon him not only the kiss of peace, but actually gives him His Flesh to eat and His Blood to drink. To one who not only believes this, but who thoroughly realizes all that it means, life itself takes on a different hue.

What are the chief effects of this vivid consciousness? The first is a certain joy. The priest who has this consciousness feels that he has God Himself for his friend. The first thought that comes to occupy his mind as he awakes in the morning is: "The Infinite and the Eternal is coming to visit me this day. In a few minutes, He who is the delight of the angels and the reward of the saints above, will be closely united to me, and will rest in my hands as He rested in the hands of His Blessed Mother. He came to me in all His infinite majesty and splendor yesterday (though hidden from my eyes), and now He is about to repeat the favor and unite Himself to me again. What condescension! What goodness! What unspeakable love! He is the infinite God, yet what wondrous familiarity! He is the eternal and the uncreated, yet what intimate and un-

paralleled friendship! Is there any privilege like to this? Is there any favor that can for one moment be compared with it? What have the saints in heaven but Thee, yet Thou comest to me in Thy divine as well as in Thy human nature! Oh! mystery of divine tenderness! Oh! miracle of unfathomable love! Oh! sublime and infinite condescension! All that the world can offer is nothing to this. No gift or grace from any king or earthly potentate can bear comparison with it, yet it is mine, and will be mine to the end."

Once a priest has grasped and brought home to himself the real living presence of the eternal God in the Mass, and all that the Mass means, several results naturally follow.

Besides (1) the inward joy and spiritual consolation of which I have already spoken, he will be induced (2) to celebrate with the utmost fervor and devotion. He will edify the faithful and stimulate the devotion of all who assist by his recollection, his evident piety, and his absorbed attention to what he is doing. He will not only keep his soul pure and free from every stain, so as to offer up the spotless Victim as worthily as possible, but (3) he will see that the altar-linen, the vestments, and everything that has to do with the ceremony are clean and

decent and as they should be according to the rubrics. In a word, his very realization of what the Blessed Sacrament is, will cause him to understand that every rubric should be carried out perfectly, and that every respect and veneration should be shown to Him who comes hidden beneath the wheaten veils of the Adorable Sacrament.

Another or fourth effect of a more perfect realization of the dignity and efficacy of the Mass will be to render the priest most unwilling to forego the happiness of celebrating it. The lukewarm and careless priest will omit saying Mass for very inadequate reasons. He will allow almost any excuse to deprive him of this immense grace. But the priest who meditates, and who often turns over in his mind the miraculous powers which have been conferred upon him in his ordination, will look upon the Mass as the one supreme and most glorious act he can possibly perform, and will suffer almost anything rather than omit celebrating even once. He will regard the day as lost on which he is prevented from approaching the altar, and feel infinite regret at his irreparable loss.

Oh! what untold blessings are procured for the Church by him who worthily celebrates every day! The saintly Bishop of Marseilles, Msgr.

Charles J. E. de Mazenod, who founded the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, used to deplore bitterly the blindness of those priests who do not reflect on this truth. "Amongst the injunctions which he addressed to the members of his Congregation in England, after visiting that province, was one concerning the daily celebration of Holy Mass. He had been grieved and even scandalized," says his biographer, "to find that some priests were negligent in that respect. . . . In a letter which he sent to the Fathers, he said: I met a certain chaplain, a good priest in every other way, who said to me in a religious house in which I was to say Mass: 'I shall give myself a rest to-morrow.' He did not mean that he would rise later, but simply that he would not take the trouble to say Mass. The holy Bishop could never bring himself to understand how any priest could ever speak or think in such a way" ("Life," pp. 125, 126).

Let us conclude this chapter in the words of the great old English saint and historian, the Venerable Bede: "Sacerdos non legitime impeditus, celebrare omittens, quantum in eo est, (1) privat Sanctam Trinitatem laude et gloria, (2) Angelos lætitia, (3) peccatores venia, (4) justos subsidio et gratia, (5) in Purgatorio existentes refrigerio, (6) ecclesiam spirituali

Christi beneficio, (7) et seipsum medicina et remedio."

The author of "The Imitation of Christ" throws the same idea into a somewhat different form, when he writes: "When a priest celebrates, he honors God, rejoices the angels, edifies the Church, helps the living, obtains rest for the dead, and makes himself partaker of all good things" (IV. 5).

Surely, if we weigh these solemn words, it ought to be enough to convince us that nothing but a very grave cause should hinder us from offering with deep gratefulness and inward joy the most sublime of mysteries, and the very grandest of all sacrifices!

CHAPTER III

WHY PRIESTS SHOULD BE HOLY

"You are the salt of the earth . . . the light of the world" (Matt., v. 13, 14).

THE more carefully we consider the different duties which a priest is called upon to perform, the more clearly shall we realize his obligation to be holy. One of the chief purposes for which he is ordained is that he may sanctify others. He is to be "the light of the world" and "the salt of the earth." St. Jerome, as already said, calls priests "mundi salvatores," and many other saints speak in a similar manner.

Now, to succeed in enlightening and in sanctifying others, two things are absolutely necessary. The first is to possess the will, and the second is to possess the power. Let us take the will first.

Before I can be really enthusiastic and earnest in my endeavors to sanctify others, I must entertain within my own heart the highest possible appreciation of sanctity. I must regard it as

the very greatest of treasures, and esteem it far beyond all else. I must feel that there is nothing more desirable, nothing so worthy of my labor and toil. For, unless sanctity be the most precious thing in my eyes and my most valued possession, how shall I be led to exert myself assiduously for the sanctification of others? If I attach but little importance to my own sanctification, how shall I be on fire to impart this most tremendous gift to those under my charge? What one values most highly, one desires first for oneself. Then, having acquired it, one seeks to put others in possession of it. But if I esteem it so lightly as to entertain no strong desire for it myself, how can I possibly hope to exert all my strength to secure it for those under my care? Bear this in mind: The glory which each priest should principally aim at giving to God, and which God principally expects from him, consists in the sanctification of his own soul. How, in fact, can anyone be really zealous for the divine honor or sincerely desirous to promote it among others, if he neglect to give God that glory which is within his own poor power to afford?

This is the dangerous error which our Blessed Redeemer wished to condemn by His private life at Nazareth. For this reason He spent

thirty years in retirement, preparing for His public mission, which lasted but for three. And how did He occupy Himself during all that time? In prayer, in contemplation, and in the exercise of every virtue, especially the virtues of humility, patience and obedience. What need had He of so long a retirement? Is He not the Holy of holies? Is He not sanctity itself? True; but He wished thereby to instruct all Christians, more particularly priests, that the great and the primary object of their entire lives should be their own sanctification; that, if they succeed in this, nothing can go amiss with them; but that, if they neglect it, nothing else can profit them, even though they were to save the whole world. If, then, a priest has not enough appreciation of sanctity to try and sanctify himself, how will he have enough appreciation to labor and toil and exert himself to sanctify others? It would be absurd to expect it.

But something more than zeal and enthusiasm for the sanctification of others is needed. Besides the *will*, he must likewise have the requisite *power*. And this power will be in proportion to his personal sanctity. To lead souls to God, to fill them with supernatural grace, and to make them really holy in God's sight, the

priest must be most closely united with our divine Lord. In other words, he must be holy himself. This is most clearly and unmistakably taught by Christ Himself: "Abide in Me, and I in you." And why? Because, "just as the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abide in the vine, so neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you the branches. He that abideth in Me, and I in him, the same beareth much fruit" (John, xv. 4–5).

The sanctification of a soul is essentially a spiritual and a supernatural work. It is not brought about by human learning or endeavor; it is not the result of any purely natural effort or persuasion. It is wholly the effect of grace, and must come from God. "Unless the Lord build the house, they labor in vain who build." We may be diligent and earnest, but that is not enough. We must be united to God, and God must be dwelling within us, and working through us and with us, if we are to produce any lasting fruit. What will be the use of our watching over the flock entrusted to our keeping, and trying to protect it from all spiritual harm, unless God Himself defend and guard it? We are powerful only in so far as God is acting in us and through us. "Unless the Lord keep the

city, he watcheth in vain that keepeth it." All this proves very clearly the absolute necessity of living a life of the closest possible union with God—in short, a life of Christ-like holiness—if we are to be anything better than "sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal" (I Cor., xiii. 1).

The whole history of God's dealings with His creatures shows us that, if we are appointed their leaders and their teachers, we must, above all things, be holy and irreproachable in our lives. Why were the prayers of such leaders as Abraham and Moses and Daniel, and Jeremias and Isaias and others, of such wondrous efficacy? Why were they able to obtain such marvelous favors for their sinful and rebellious followers? How did they manage to ward off the anger of God again and again, and secure His forgiveness for their guilty subjects, by their earnest prayers and words of burning entreaty? It was entirely owing to their extraordinary and heroic sanctity; for, the holier a person is, the more ready is God to listen to his voice and to grant his prayer. The same law still holds, so that the more closely united we are to God, the more will our power for good increase, and the wider and the more efficacious will become our influence.

Learning is, of course, most useful, and every

priest should endeavor to devote some time to study. But sanctity is immeasurably more essential, and will often work far greater wonders and save many more souls than the greatest learning unaccompanied by sanctity. Our Lord tells us that we can do nothing without Him: "Without Me you can do nothing" (John, xv. 5); but that, if only we "abide in Him, we shall bring forth very much fruit" (John, xv. 8). If, then, our ministrations have not always borne all the fruit we expected in the past, we may easily guess the cause. "The Scriptures tell us that what God demands before all things of His priests is holiness. He requires science, or He will reject them; zeal to do their office, or they will be a useless incumbrance. But the highest and most indispensable attribute of God's priests is sanctity" (Manning).

Bishop Ullathorne has a striking passage on this subject, in his "Endowments of Man" (p. 238). He writes: "A single soul raised by the combat with evil to heroic virtue and sanctity is a host in himself, in comparison with a thousand—and it may be with ten thousand—who are living but ordinary lives of piety, with no evil to contend with or to rectify. Abraham alone, by his fidelity amid an evil generation, arose to such friendship with God that he al-

most overbalanced the evil of five criminal cities." And a priest will exercise a like power, in a greater or a lesser degree, according to the degree of sanctity to which he has attained. If he be filled with the love of God, he will do more for God's glory in saving and sanctifying souls than a hundred whose hearts are cold. If he loves perfectly, he will do great things and count them little; he will do many things and count them few; he will work a long time and count it short, for to him, as to Jacob, the days will seem few by reason of the greatness of his love.

In short, a priest's power for good depends on the measure of his sanctity. All priests are instruments in the hands of God for the sanctification and the salvation of His elect. But, the holier the priest, the more perfect the instrument in the hands of God, and the more penetrating his influence on the faithful to whom he administers.

St. Philip was wont to exclaim: "Find me twelve men fit to be Apostles, and I will convert the world"; for he realized that heroic sanctity, even though possessed by few, will do more than anything else whatsoever to touch men's hearts and lead them to repentance. "If," writes Cardinal Manning, "the state of the priesthood

were the state of *perfectionis adquirendæ,* a luke-warm priest might more easily regain his fervor. But, as it is a state *perfectionis exercendæ, conservandæ, et amplius augmentandæ,* he has already received the greatest vocation, next after the divine maternity of Mary and the foster-fatherhood of Joseph, ever bestowed upon man, and with it the greatest grace, because proportionate to that vocation" ("Eternal Priesthood," p. 48). St. Paul says to every priest: "Be thou an example of the faithful in word, in conversation, in charity, in faith, in chastity. . . . Neglect not the grace that is in thee, which was given to thee by prophecy, with imposition of the hands of the priesthood. Meditate upon these things, be wholly occupied with these things (*hæc meditare, in his esto*), that thy profiting (that is, thy growth in sanctity) may be manifest to all. Take heed to thyself and to doctrine; be earnest in them. For in doing this thou shalt both save thyself and them that hear thee" (I Tim., iv. 12, 14–16).

From what has been said it is surely abundantly clear that a priest's first and most essential duty is to sanctify his own soul. And how should I enter upon this most important task?

In the *first* place, I should recognize it as a *personal* matter.

In the *second* place, I should understand that the task is, at the same time, difficult as well as necessary.

In the *third* place, I should regard it as extremely pressing, and brooking no delay.

We will consider these three points in turn.

(1) It is a most personal matter, because all my interests are intimately bound up with my greater or less success in acquiring this treasure. Pause for a moment and consider what there is to gain, and what there is to lose: an eternity of agonizing pain or an eternity of unspeakable delights are quivering in the balance, for heaven or hell must be the final outcome of my success or my failure. If I live a holy life for the few short and uncertain years that I must spend in this world, I shall without doubt enter the glorious kingdom of heaven, and rejoice for evermore with God and His holy angels and saints. If, on the other hand, I fail and prove myself unworthy of my high calling, I shall most inevitably be cast headlong into the deepest abyss of the bottomless pit to suffer excruciating torments for ever and ever.

Can I conceive anything of more vital or more pressing importance than the sanctification of my soul? It is impossible to realize what is at stake without being filled with the strongest

determination to carry it through to a successful issue. A true priest will do all he can to sanctify his flock and to lead them to heaven; but he knows that his first duty is to himself. Hence, I can truly say that God will censure my zeal, unless I am myself the principal object of it. I may consume my strength and wear myself out in trying to save others, but I am worse than a fool, if, while doing so, I am neglecting myself. My *first* duty is to myself (*Attendite vobis. . . . Attende tibi. . . . Admoneo te ut resuscites gratiam Dei quod est in te*). "What does it profit you," asks St. Bernard, "to have converted the entire world, if you yourself are eternally lost?" The great Apostle of the Gentiles puts the whole position before us in a very forcible way, when he says: "I therefore so run, not as at an uncertainty: I so fight, not as one beating the air. But I chastise my body and bring it into subjection, lest perhaps, when I have preached to others, I myself should become a castaway" (I Cor., ix. 26–27). If even so exalted and so grand a saint as St. Paul could feel insecure and in some degree anxious about his own salvation, how much more should we feel anxious about our own, and how much more careful should we be to render our salvation more and more certain?

(2) Then, in the second place, I must remember that, while my sanctification is absolutely necessary if I am to save my soul, yet it is not without its difficulties; that is to say, it is difficult in view of the eminent perfection that God expects of His chosen ministers and the self-renunciation which He demands of those who have dedicated themselves to the service of the altar. Both Albertus Magnus and St. Thomas have said truly that, while on the one hand no greater power and dignity than the power and dignity of consecrating the Body of Christ was ever bestowed upon man, so on the other hand no greater sanctity and perfection can be conceived than the sanctity and perfection required in the priest for so divine an action. Our Lord expects all His disciples to be men of virtue and self-denial, but He expects His priests to "lead the flock," to go before them, and to surpass them in personal holiness. "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross *daily*, and follow Me" (Luke, ix. 23). This constant overcoming of nature and this ceaseless resistance to our inclinations and passions, by the help of God's grace and for the health of our soul, make the path to heaven so strait and so narrow that even our divine Lord was wont to exclaim with

emphasis: "How strait is the way that leadeth to life!" (Matt., vii. 14.) Yes, there can be no doubt but that there are difficulties to be met with in the path to heaven, which only the earnest and the generous-minded will fully overcome. This is not our opinion alone, it is the verdict of the inspired Word of God. "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent bear it away" (Matt., xi. 12). Hence St. Luke bids us all to strive valiantly to enter (*contendite intrare*), as though slight and ordinary efforts would not suffice.

One may not look with favor at these difficulties. One may wish that salvation were to be obtained on even easier terms. But we must accept things as they are. A struggle is necessary. And no sane man disputes with necessity. When there is no choice, a wise man submits. Everything has to bend before the unavoidable. There are indubitably difficulties, but, if a man be sound of heart, difficulties will but inflame his courage, and he will face them with earnest determination so soon as he realizes that, at any price, they must be overcome. I may indeed make up my mind to submit to certain evils rather than struggle against them, but never to the appalling evil of eternal damnation. At any cost I must guard myself against that.

Heaven and an eternity of happiness with God —that is the *unum necessarium*. To secure *that*, every difficulty must be bravely faced and conquered. Which words are the easier to listen to: "Take up thy cross, and follow Me," or, "Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire"? My choice lies between them. If I do not take up my cross and follow our blessed Lord along the narrow way, then I must be following the broad road that leads to damnation.

(3) Lastly, I must realize that the obligation I lie under of sanctifying my soul is pressing, and admits of no delay. I am already a priest. Morning after morning I have the immense and wholly unparalleled privilege of offering up the adorable Sacrifice of the Mass. I ought already to be a saint. But, alas, my conscience tells me that I am very far from being anything of the kind. On the contrary, I know myself to be full of imperfections, faults, and spiritual slackness.

St. Paul, in inspired language, clearly lays down what a really good pastor ought to be. In the first place, he should be blameless (*irreprehensibilis*), and in the second place he should be adorned with every virtue (*virtutibus ornatus*). In order that I should fulfill the first condition, it is requisite that I should be free

from every vice and from every reprehensible habit. For, as St. Jerome says: "He is called irreprehensible, who is free from vice." This is what we may rightly call merely a negative sanctity. It is but the first step in the process. It is, as it were, but the clearing of the ground preparatory to building up the spiritual edifice. I must be not only free from all vice and sin, but clothed with every virtue and adorned with every perfection. "He alone is adorned who is strong in virtues" (*Solus qui virtutibus pollet ornatus est*). If this be the case, then I have a long way to travel, and must be up and doing without delay. It will take time to rid myself of my many defects and miserable imperfections. It may take me still longer to acquire, especially in a high degree, all the virtues proper to my state. But time is short. Life is passing swiftly away, and besides it is uncertain. I cannot promise myself a year, or even a month, or so much as a single week. To put off the important task of my sacerdotal perfection, to postpone it even for one day, would be reprehensible. I must start at once. I must at least make a beginning while the chance is given to me. For "the night cometh, when no man can work" (John, ix. 4), and may overtake me long before I have accomplished my task.

Though I may not have accomplished what I set out to do, yet, when "the night cometh," I shall not be charged with culpable negligence, provided I am found earnestly striving. If God sees that I am actually doing my best and sincerely aiming at perfection, He will be merciful and indulgent, even though I am still far away from the goal. What He appreciates and what He rewards, is the sincere endeavor, the good will, the upright intention.

Then let us, in His name, seize the present moment, and begin to make every effort to build up the magnificent edifice of our own sacerdotal sanctity. Let us do our utmost without delay to render ourselves less unworthy of the stupendous dignity, which, without any merit upon our part, He has bestowed upon us.

In conclusion, I feel I cannot do better than quote the following practical admonition from the saintly Antonius de Molina (*Instruc. sacerdotum,* tr. 4, c. 6): "It is absolutely necessary that the whole life of the priest shall be a preparation for the worthy celebration (of the Holy Sacrifice): in all things he shall act so circumspectly that he may be said to be always prepared to celebrate, and in every one of his words and actions he shall remember that he has celebrated today and is to celebrate tomorrow."

CHAPTER IV

"BE YE HOLY"

"According to Him that hath called you, who is holy, be you also holy" (I Peter, i. 15).

WE have already considered several reasons why a priest should be holy and a true "man of God," as the Holy Scriptures express it. Let us now consider some of the most important and practical means of securing holiness. Perhaps the first and the most obvious is prayer.

Now prayer is of two different kinds. It may be chiefly vocal (such as the Divine Office), or it may be purely mental (such as meditation and contemplation).

In this chapter we will confine ourselves to the subject of mental prayer or meditation. This practice is strongly recommended by a thousand texts in Holy Scripture, and its admirable effects are portrayed again and again in its inspired pages. "Blessed is the man that shall meditate on the law of God day and night," says holy

David. "He shall be like a tree which is planted near the running waters, which shall bring forth its fruit in due season; and his leaf shall not fall off; and all whatsoever he shall do shall prosper" (Ps., i. 3).

If, indeed, we accept the words of Holy Scripture and the teaching of the great saints of God, it must be confessed that it would be difficult indeed to exaggerate the immense importance and the extraordinary effect of mental prayer, or to measure by any human standard its exceedingly great power as an instrument of sanctification. The glorious canonized members of God's Church, who are justly credited with a vastly larger measure of heavenly wisdom and of spiritual discernment than falls to the lot of us poor sinners, have both practised it assiduously themselves, and urged its practice upon others.

This sacred duty—which St. Paul impressed upon Timothy with all the weight of authority of an inspired Apostle: "Meditate on these things, be wholly occupied with these things" (I Tim., iv. 15)—St. Bernard urged with no less warmth on the Pope of his day (Blessed Eugene III). "I fear for you, Eugene," he wrote, "lest, omitting prayer and consideration, the multitude of affairs may bring you to a hard

heart, which abhors not itself, because it perceives not." Cardinal Bellarmine teaches that "it is morally impossible for anyone to live without sin, who neglects meditation." Gerson seems almost to repeat his words, when he says: "Without the practice of meditation, no one can attain to the true norm of the Christian religion except through a special miracle of God."

On the other hand, St. Teresa declares: "No one who perseveres in mental prayer can continue to lead a bad or even an indifferent life. He will either give up meditation, or else give up his evil life. *The two cannot go on together.*" The same idea, though expressed in somewhat different words, may be found in the writings of St. John Climacus, St. John Chrysostom, St. Bernard, St. Alphonsus de Liguori, St. Ignatius of Loyola, and a great many more, whom it would be tedious to mention.

With such testimony before our eyes, it would evidently be the height of presumption for us to suppose that we shall ever be able to make any headway against our spiritual foes or advance to any intimate union with God, unless we have recourse to frequent and earnest reflection upon divine things.

But, even if the saints and other spiritual guides were silent on the point, I think our own

reason (to say nothing of our experience) would soon convince us of the need of thoughtful consideration, since this need follows from the very nature and conditions of the task before us, as we shall now endeavor to point out.

To begin with, we must remember that the true seat of all sanctity must be sought for in the will and in the affections. The will is the source of all merit and of all demerit, so that we shall be for all eternity that which our will makes us. Now, man is so constituted that his will cannot move except in obedience to some stimulus. It can no more act without one than a sailing ship can advance through the ocean without the wind. Man's will is free? Most certainly, but in what sense? It is free to choose between one motive and another. It is free to follow this attraction rather than that, but it is by no means free to act in the complete absence of all motive. Further, it must be borne in mind that a motive which is not perceived, and which never passes into the field of consciousness, may be the strongest imaginable in itself, but it will produce no effect and exercise no influence whatever on the mind that has not grasped it. It is an axiom, in philosophy, that "nothing can be desired, unless it be known" (*nihil volitum nisi cognitum*). To appreciate

a thing of which one knows nothing and to desire it ardently, is an absolute impossibility. Hence, there is no doubt that the great and sublime truths of the spiritual world can never exercise any strong influence upon us, except in so far as they are perceived by our minds. And they can never become known as they should be, except by the direct and earnest application of the mind to their consideration. It is in this that the material world possesses such a stupendous advantage over the invisible world in its ceaseless efforts to possess our souls and to lead us captive.

The visible world around us is full of attractions, which make a most direct and powerful appeal to our senses. Its pleasures and its amusements, its riches and its honors, its favors and its delights, are visible, patent, obvious, and palpable. So too are its pains and penalties, its poverty and disgrace. We may be careless, but these things provoke our attention. They thrust themselves upon our notice, whether we will it or not. We simply cannot help being conscious of their presence. They are far too self-asserting, too self-evident for us ever to live in forgetfulness of them.

Now, with the spiritual world it is precisely the reverse. To most people the spiritual

world is comparatively an unknown world. It is wholly invisible and impervious to the senses. So far from forcing itself upon our notice or compelling our attention, it keeps entirely out of view, and will never obtrude itself upon us at all. In short, it is so hidden and so entirely out of reach of the eyes and the ears and of the other senses that thousands actually pass through life without realizing or acknowledging or even troubling about its existence. They are so occupied and so interested and deeply absorbed in the things of time as to be wholly insensible of the only enduring things of eternity. Though, day by day, tens of thousands of their fellow-creatures (men and women like themselves) pass out of this world, and are summoned before the dread judgment seat of God there to receive an irrevocable sentence, they seem in no way aware of it. They take no heed. Why is this? The reason is because there are no reporters in the heavenly law courts. There is no external evidence of their trial and condemnation in the press. Their daily paper does not give any account of the summing up of the supreme Judge nor of the demeanor of the culprits. The consequence is that men of the world are not interested and pay no heed. So that, if the inextinguishable

flames of hell are inflicting excruciating torments upon these sinners (who are perhaps not even as guilty as themselves), the fact is not brought home to them in any way, and they remain quite unconcerned.

With the punishments inflicted by the civil law, it is quite different. The hangman's rope and the executioner's sword they can see and understand, and they have no difficulty in realizing what hard labor and transportation and imprisonment for life mean. They are careful, in consequence, to avoid incurring such penalties, and will not readily break the law of the land. But the law of God they will violate without hesitation. The divine commands, which should direct their most secret acts and control even their innermost thoughts, seem to them to be without any adequate sanction. They can detect no sign of puishment by means of any of the senses. However intently they may watch, they cannot actually see sin enter the soul like some hideous disease, and destroy its marvelous beauty, and render it utterly loathsome and hideous. They cannot actually see the Holy Spirit of God being driven forth from His tabernacle to make room for the unclean spirit of evil, the devil. They are wholly incapable of gazing at the golden gates of para-

dise, as they swing to and are barred and firmly locked against the soul, which has just sunk into grievous sin.

All these changes and a thousand others are taking place around us, but not even the greatest of them is perceived by the dull senses of man. As a consequence, such tremendous facts as would startle and arouse even the most callous, could he be made vividly conscious of them, pass unheeded and unnoticed.

This is a lamentable state of things. What is the remedy? How is this appalling apathy to be dispelled? How are we to bring light to the blind and hearing to the spiritually deaf? The answer is plain. We must render the invisible visible. We must so act as to bring these momentous truths within the field of consciousness. In one word, since we find it impossible with the eyes of the body to behold what concerns us so nearly, we must open wide the eyes of the soul. That is to say, we must pause awhile, recollect ourselves, listen attentively and lovingly to the voice of God, and slowly and thoughtfully ponder over the sublime truths that He has made known to us either directly or by the teaching of His infallible Church. We must apply our minds to the task, until we can in a measure realize their meaning and com-

prehend their intense reality and importance. This, after all, is merely saying what all the saints and spiritual writers tell us, namely, *we must meditate.*

Why is it, let me ask, that even a worldly-minded man, while lying on the point of death, judges so differently of the value of things to what he did while in the heyday of life and vigor? Well, the answer is because then he is obliged to reflect. His bodily weakness, his failing senses, his pain and discomfort tell him (whether he will or not) that the end is at hand, that his life is wellnigh over, and that he must in a few minutes stand naked and alone before the supreme Judge. Then he begins to acknowledge to himself, even though he has never admitted it before, that wealth and station, wide possessions, a great name, troops of friends, success in business, and all else he once prized so highly, are but poor commendations and of little worth as a means of securing heaven and a favorable sentence from the lips of the all-holy and impartial Judge.

Certainly, the discovery is tardily made. It would have been more profitable to have made it earlier, while time for amendment still remained. Now, alas, it is perhaps too late. How different things would have been, if he had

been accustomed to meditate! "Oh Death, thy judgment is right!" exclaims the great St. Bernard. But one who seriously meditates, may even during the prime of life—and while there is yet full time to act upon them—easily reach the conclusions that are often arrived at only under the influences of approaching death. If we are to make any real advance in virtue and perfection, it is not enough that we should accept all the truths revealed to us, and that we should believe every doctrine taught by the Church. It is likewise necessary that we should, at least to some extent, appreciate and realize them. Now, to enable us to attain to this realization, is the special end and purpose of meditation.

A year or two ago, a criminal lay under sentence of death in an English jail, and was daily awaiting the hour of his execution. For several months he had lain in his prison cell, fully aware of his fate, yet he bore himself in a bold, careless and almost defiant manner, and seemed almost indifferent as to his terrible end. At last the fatal hour arrived, and, as the prison clock struck eight, he was pinioned and led to the place of execution. Still he appeared wholly unmoved, and walked from his cell and through the prison yard with a firm

tread and with an untroubled look until—suddenly turning a corner, his eyes all at once caught sight of the ghastly gallows, the dangling noose, the trap-door, and all the other awful paraphernalia, in readiness for the appalling tragedy. Then, on the instant, a complete change came over him. Every particle of color vanished from his cheeks, from head to foot he shook with terror, and finally, wholly unnerved, he fell back swooning into the arms of the warders who accompanied him.

Why this sudden change? It was all owing to the mental condition of the criminal. It was merely the change from "believing" to "realizing." The scene that met his gaze, as he turned the corner, made no fresh disclosure. It conveyed no new information; it told him nothing that he had not already known from the time when the judge had passed sentence. Why then this extraordinary alteration in his attitude and behavior? Why this unlooked-for fright and loss of self-control? Who had uttered one word to alarm the unhappy culprit? No one. Again I say, the explanation is that, whereas before he merely believed, now he realized. The judge spoke to his inattentive ears. The gallows and the hempen cord, on the contrary, spoke directly to his heart and innermost

sense. The first simply stated the truth, but the second drove it right home.

Now, that is precisely the task and the chief purpose of regular and persevering meditation on the invisible things of eternity. It is to drive these truths right home. By faith we merely know and accept them. By meditation we render them, as it were, visible, actual, and palpable.

It has been said often, and with much truth, that there is no man living, however wicked, dissolute and perverse, who would not reform his life, if he could be made to realize fully both the certainty and the severity of God's judgments. Thus, for instance, were it possible to take even the most profligate and abandoned wretch in the world, and place him on the borders of the "lake of inextinguishable fire," spoken of by our Lord, in such a way that he could actually gaze upon and contemplate the excruciating agonies of the damned, and watch "the smoke of their torments rising for ever and ever before the throne of God," there is no shadow of doubt that he would abandon his evil course and be converted and live holily.

Now this is just what meditation is calculated to do, to a large extent, for those who rightly practise it. Meditation removes us for the time

from the busy, noisy, and distracting world in which we live, and, as it were, sets us down either on the brink of hell, or else at the foot of the Cross on Calvary, where the mangled form of the eternal Son of God is stretched in agony for love of us, or perhaps at the glorious entrance of heaven, where myriads of angels and saints are rejoicing and waiting to welcome us in, or in view of some other striking scene in the invisible world, where we may realize more vividly and grasp more firmly those important truths which have only to be grasped in order to influence us and control our conduct.

Unless, by means of meditation, these invisible scenes are made visible, they will leave no strong or lasting impression upon us, nor will they induce us to shape our lives in accordance with the dictates of true wisdom. Nothing indeed but the daily habit of earnest reflection will ever stir our hearts or arouse our souls to action, for nothing else can supply us with adequate motives.

If we look around upon the world, we shall find that, in the affairs of this life, men are being continually influenced and stirred into action by a great variety of motives, but they may all be classed under one of three heads. They are urged to exert themselves in every case either

through (1) *fear* of pain, (2) *hope* of gain, or else (3) *love* of wife or children or someone dear to them. Thus, a man will bestir himself and work hard for fear of poverty and want and all that extreme poverty implies: this fear drives him on, and compels him to exert himself. Or it may be the hope of a high wage, or of a coveted position, or of fame and reputation that makes him willing and anxious to labor and toil. But, if it is neither the fear of pain nor the hope of gain, then he will be actuated by his love of wife, children, or dependents. Out of love for them he will brace himself up to strenuous labor so as to supply their needs and enable them to live.

A little reflection will convince us that these are the three powerful motives that keep men, all over the world, busy and occupied, and ready to deny themselves. In every walk of life and in every grade of society, wherever we find men applying themselves with energy and industry and leading laborious lives, we shall invariably notice that they are moved by one or another of these three motives, sometimes by all three at once.

Now comes the important question. So far we have been considering these motives in the natural order, but do not the self-same motives

exist, only in an infinitely more intense degree, in the spiritual order? Most certainly they do. Let us take them one by one.

(1) The dread of pain. What pain can, for one moment, be compared to the pain of hell?

(2) The desire of gain. What are all the treasures of earth, what are all its pleasures and delights, compared to those of the blessed in heaven?

(3) The love of wife, children or friends. But what love can compare with the love of God? What can compare with divine love, either in intensity or constancy or excellence?

Thus, it is seen at a glance that, not only have we all the motives in the supernatural order which exist in the natural order, but that we have them in an infinitely more intense measure. In fact, the difference between the temporal and the eternal is so great that it can not be measured. There is literally no sort of comparison between them. The very utmost that the world can offer us under any one of these three headings, is as nothing whatever when set beside what God offers His faithful servants.

Then, how does it arise that the weak, worldly motives produce such an amazing and prodigious effect upon the toiling, moiling mul-

titudes in every land and in every clime, while the spiritual, supernatural, and vastly stronger motives scarcely produce any effect at all?

The answer is: because the first are seen, and the second are not seen; the first are realized, but the second are not realized; the first lie well within the field of vivid consciousness, while the second are allowed to remain forgotten, neglected, and as unheeded as though they had no existence whatsoever.

For this deplorable state of things there is but one remedy. We must bestir ourselves, exert our mental faculties, and apply ourselves to earnest and persevering meditation.

The fundamental principle affecting the whole spiritual life and controlling the action of the human mind, is a very simple one indeed, but of extreme spiritual interest. It is that a motive, however strong, however well established, and however irresistible in itself, is not merely weak and utterly valueless to the mind it fails to reach, but it is simply no motive at all! In so far as its effect is concerned, it might just as well not exist. As we say in philosophy: "De non apparentibus et de non existentibus eadem est ratio." So long as it remains unperceived by the mind, even the most cogent motive can no more stimulate it or quicken it into action

than uneaten food can stimulate or quicken the circulation of the blood. For it is quite as essential in the case of the mind, as in the case of the body, that a certain process of assimilation and digestion should precede all vital action. This, as regards the soul, means meditation, or what has been expressively and truly called "chewing the cud of thought."

It is in meditation that the soul is drawn near to God; it is then that God speaks to it with loving familiarity; and it is then, too, that the devout soul learns what its duties and obligations really are, as well as how to fulfill them all in the proper manner. St. Bernard tells us: "It is meditation that purifies our mind, rules our affections, directs our actions, corrects our excesses, determines our character, and dignifies and orders our lives" (*De Consid.,* I, vii).

A priest who neglects this holy and necessary exercise lives in a world of phantoms and dreams, whereas he who assiduously practises it, dwells in a most delightful land of deep reality.

Let us, then, resolve to be faithful to mental prayer, and prove the sincerity of our desire for holiness and a closer union with God by making a regular and constant use of this most powerful and efficacious means of acquiring

both. Bishop Hedley truly says ("Retreat," p. 155): "He who, because of his work, neglects his mental prayer, condemns his work to sterility, his intelligence to darkness, and his heart to the loss of the spirtual sense."

CHAPTER V

VOCAL PRAYER IN GENERAL

"Whatsoever you shall ask the Father in My name, that will I do" (John, xiv. 13).

PRAYER is commonly divided into two kinds: mental and vocal. But vocal prayer is, strictly speaking, not prayer at all, unless it be also mental. Whether words be used or not, the mind and the heart must be fixed on God, or else there is no real prayer at all. All prayer is and must be to some extent mental; otherwise, it cannot be called prayer in any true sense of the word. It would be better to divide all prayer into: (1) prayer accompanied by a set form of words, and (2) prayer without any fixed form of words. Under the first division would come the Divine Office, which must always be recited *digne, attente ac devote;* under the second, meditation and contemplation, where no special words are used, and where no formal phrases are prescribed. But in both vocal and mental prayer we are expected to "raise our minds and thoughts to God."

"It is useless," writes Peter Canisius, "to sing with the voice only without the intention of the heart; but, as the Apostle says, you should sing in your hearts—that is, not with voice only but also with your hearts. Wherefore, we also read elsewhere: 'I will sing with the spirit, I will sing also with the understanding' (I Cor., xiv. 15)." We have already spoken of the necessity and importance of mental prayer. Now let us speak of vocal prayer.

Of all the duties of a Christian, the first and most essential is that of prayer. Prayer is to the soul what food is to the body. To abandon prayer is certain death. If it be true that our body will certainly die when deprived of food, it is quite as certain that our soul will die spiritually when deprived of its proper food, which is prayer. It is the common teaching of all spiritual writers that "if we pray well, all will go well; whereas, if we neglect prayer, the whole of our spirtual life is bound to suffer."

The absolute need of prayer arises from our personal weakness and utter helplessness. In the first place, we must remember that we are surrounded by powerful and unscrupulous enemies. Not only are the devil, the world, and the flesh constantly striving to deprive us of our spiritual life, but our unruly passions and

evil inclinations are only too ready to aid them in their nefarious designs. What are our chances of victory in this incessant warfare? What are we able to do, of ourselves, in our own defense? Absolutely nothing. The infallible words of our divine Lord on this point are terribly clear and unmistakable. He says: "Without Me, you can do nothing." He does not say that we can do but little. He will not allow that we can do anything whatever. No, He assures us that we can do *nothing*.

St. Paul expresses the same solemn truth in a somewhat expanded form. He writes: "Not that we are sufficient to think anything of ourselves, as of ourselves: but our sufficiency is from God" (II Cor., iii. 5). And in another place he writes: "No man can say the Lord Jesus, but by the Holy Ghost" (I Cor., xii. 3). Other texts might be quoted, but these more than suffice to prove our complete helplessness, when left to ourselves.

In fact, our case would be quite hopeless, and it would be just as well to give up the struggle, but for one thing. The Omnipotent has promised, on one condition, to come to our aid. Of yourselves, He says, you are as weak "as the ashes of tow" (Is., i. 31), but "call upon Me, and I will hear you" (Jer., xxxiii. 3). So

again, in the New Testament, He repeats His loving promise in still more emphatic words: "All things, whatsoever you ask when ye pray, believe that you shall receive; and they shall come unto you" (Mark, xi. 24). Indeed, the necessity of prayer is so pressing and so constant that our divine Master is never weary of commanding us to make use of so wonderful and yet so simple a means. "Watch ye and pray" (Matt., xxvi. 41). "Call upon Me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver thee" (Ps., xlix. 15). "Ask and it shall be given you; seek and you shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you" (Matt., vii. 7).

Again and again, throughout the whole length and breadth of the Bible, we are exhorted to pray. And those who obey these exhortations gain continual victories, because God is fighting with them, while those who will not even take the trouble to seek God's help perish miserably. "My grace is sufficient for thee" (II Cor., xii. 9). Yes, God's grace will enable us to overcome every obstacle. And grace comes always in answer to prayer. Hence, so long as we are constant in calling upon the name of the Lord, we are very secure and more than a match for all our sworn enemies; and we may call out, with all the assurance of St.

Paul: "I can do all things in Him who strengtheneth me" (Phil., iv. 13). For "the Lord is good, and giveth strength in the day of trouble, and knoweth them that hope in Him" (Nah., i. 7).

Of all the graces given to man, one of the most indispensable is the grace to pray. Wherever we may be, and in whatsoever condition of body or of mind, we can always converse with God. We may be too delicate to fast, too poor to bestow an alms, too far from a church to assist at the Holy Sacrifice, and so forth, but we can always pray. And prayer will deliver us from every evil and difficulty. It will cause our heavenly Father to extend towards us a hand of help, even in the most difficult situation. So, "with prayer and supplication, let your petitions be known to God." For "neither is there any other nation so great, that hath gods so nigh to them, as our God is present to all our petitions" (Deut., iv. 7). Indeed, "we ought always to pray and not to faint" (Luke, xviii. 1), since "whatsoever we ask the Father in Christ's name, that will He do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son" (John, xiv. 13).

All the saints lived in an atmosphere of prayer, and, if we are to walk in their foot-

steps, we must breathe the same atmosphere. In the history of God's Church, we meet with saints of all nations, of all ages, and every condition of life; kings and queens, popes and cardinals, courtiers and chancellors, soldiers and servants, laborers and even beggars, learned and ignorant, old and young, the robust in health and confirmed invalids. In short, there is no walk in life in which canonized saints, celebrated for their heroic virtues and workers of miracles, are not to be found.

But, differ as much as they may in every other respect, in one respect they were all alike. They were without exception men of prayer. Although poles apart in other things, one great characteristic dominated them all. They one and all made prayer the chief and foremost duty of their lives. Indeed, we may declare without fear of contradiction that it would be easier to find a renowned singer without a lung, or an eminent philosopher without a brain, than a great saint without a very marked gift of prayer. Even the busiest and the most occupied contrived either to find time or make time for this most sublime and essential exercise. If the day were too full, they made use of the night —often indeed, like our divine Model, passing the whole of it in close communion with God

(Luke, vi. 12). Hence it is evident that, if we expect to make any great advance in perfection without earnest and constant prayer, we do but deceive ourselves, and are preparing the way for dire and bitter disappointment.

The whole position may be summed up in a few words: we can never become holy without constant helps and graces from Almighty God; but such graces depend upon prayer, and will certainly not be bestowed upon us, if we do not even deem it worth our while to ask and entreat God to give them to us. Our blessed Lord says: "*Ask* and you shall receive." Observe that, though the promise to help us is of the highest moment, yet it is not made absolutely, but only conditionally. It is dependent upon our asking.

Alas! how few are they who realize the irresistible power that prayer confers upon them, not only to procure graces for themselves and for others, but to change the course of affairs, to influence the current of events, to bring light into dark places, to soften hearts and to move sinners to repentance, and to work other wonders. How pointedly the late Professor of Theology, Dr. Ward, speaks, when referring to this subject ("Nature and Grace," p. 284): "The Gospel assures us of what

reason alone would render very probable—*viz.*, the great efficacy of intercessory prayer. And it is most important that we should perform this duty, not in a dry perfunctory way, but with a keen and lively interest. Now such keen and lively interest must necessarily arise in proportion as we have a practical and living persuasion that our prayers will as really and truly promote God's glory, tend to the salvation of souls, affect the course of events, redress ecclesiastical evils, and move the whole fortunes of the Church, as the most lively and energetic work can possibly do."

I wonder how many of us believe, as we should, in this wonderful and all-powerful engine, placed in our hands by the goodness of God to be used for the benefit of the Church and the welfare of mankind. If we all did, should we not have recourse to it far more frequently and with immeasurably greater zeal and earnestness? We all delight to exercise earthly powers when we are entrusted with them. Then why are we so slack and so slow in making use of such as are supernatural? Why are we so unwilling to exert ourselves on behalf of the millions all around us, who stand in the direst need? It may be partly because we have but little charity and brotherly love, but I fear it

is much more because we have no conception of our powers, nor of what may be accomplished through the agency of prayer. Weigh well the following solemn words of the famous old Bishop of Birmingham, Dr. W. Ullathorne, O.S.B., who, though dead, still speaks to us. In "Groundwork" (ed. 1882, p. 237), he writes: "At the supplication of humble souls, God changes the hearts of rulers, the action of the elements, the issue of counsels, and the direction of events. . . . It is prodigious to think what evils are stayed, and what good is begun or advanced, through the prayers of the humble servants of God. For proof, we have only to recall the names and to recite the history of Abraham, Moses, David, and Elias; of St. Paul, St. Anthony, St. Benedict, St. Francis, St. Bernard, St. Catherine of Siena, St. Teresa, St. Charles Borromeo, St. Francis Xavier, or St. Vincent of Paul. Hidden from the great world around, as the power of such as these may be, the heavenly spectators behold the secret springs of that power, and we, who are familiar with their lives, know the immense blessings that came of their presence wherever they might move."

Since we have not the heroic virtue of the saints, we cannot expect to wield their full im-

petratory power. Still, we can do much, and that much will go on always steadily increasing according to our advance in personal holiness. "There can be little doubt," observes Cardinal Manning, but that "the fertility of the lives of some pastors and the barrenness of others depend upon and are measured by their prayers. . . . We are what our communion with God makes us. Our faces shine or are dim or darkened as we are nearer or farther from God in our prayer. A calm, recollected, hopeful mind is the reward of prayer. A restless, wandering, sad and timid mind is the consequence of not praying as we ought. In truth, prayer measures our state. A priest who prays much, will do in an hour what a priest who prays less will hardly do in many days. . . . We do little, because we pray little; and, because we pray little, we are what we are" ("Eternal Priesthood," pp. 128–129).

The world, of course, has no belief in supernatural influences, never penetrates beneath the surface, and knows nothing of the inner core of things. It judges only as it sees, and it sees nothing but the external and the palpable. Hence, hours of silent prayer are in its opinion hours wasted and lost. The convents and monasteries of the contemplative Orders are nothing

better than the homes of drones, idlers, and slumberers, who might be better employed in breaking stones or in picking oakum.

But herein is manifested the truth of the inspired words: "The wisdom of the world is folly in the eyes of God," for in His eyes prayer is ranked as one of the highest, and one of the most useful, powerful and necessary occupations in which anyone can be engaged. As the late Bishop Bellord so truly said ("Meditations," II, p. 121): "Prayer is the great source of energy and spiritual life on earth. Tranquil and sluggish as the carnal-minded consider it to be, it is one of the chief forms of activity. By prayer we are able to advance effectually and to bear an actual share in the preachings of the Apostles, the sufferings of the martyrs, and the multifarious works of priests, religious Orders, and of the lay soldiers of the cross. O what abundant opportunities we have of meriting grace and glory by this means! Do not then live thoughtlessly, neglecting and wasting them, but treasure them, and use them as the merchant does the smallest chance of gain."

With such a well-grounded conviction clearly in his mind, who would not value prayer exceedingly, and use every opportunity of availing himself of so holy and so advantageous an ex-

ercise? We have drawn expressions of opinions from various authorities and multiplied quotations because of our desire to convince our readers of a truth, which is alas! but little appreciated and understood, but which is full of consolation and encouragement, and likely, if understood, to lead us to a much more assiduous recourse to this extraordinary means of grace.

Few were more enlightened in the ways of God than that renowned master of the mystical life, St. John of the Cross. Yet this is the grave warning which he addresses to us priests, who, but for the contaminating influence of the world in which we live, should be the last to need it ("Works," II, pp. 155–156): "Let those men of zeal who think by their preaching and exterior works to convert the world, consider that they would be much more edifying to the Church and more pleasing to God—even setting aside the good example they would give—if they would spend at least one half of their time in quiet prayer, even though they have not attained to the state of unitive love. Certainly, in that case, they would effect greater good and with less trouble by one single good work than by a thousand, because of the merit of their prayer and the spiritual strength it supplies. To act otherwise is to beat the air, to

do little more than nothing, sometimes nothing whatever, and occasionally even mischief; for God may give up such persons to vanity, so that they may seem to have done something, when in reality their outward occupations have no fruit at all; for it is quite certain that good works cannot be done but in the power of God."

In another passage this great servant of God writes: "An instant of pure love is more precious in the eyes of God and the soul and more profitable to the Church than all other good works together, though it may seem as if nothing were done."

To one unversed in spiritual things this may appear an astounding statement, but its accuracy is acknowledged by the highest authorities, and is indeed the common doctrine of the Church to-day. In fact, the learned Bishop of Newport, the late Dr. Hedley, expressed the very same truth in his "Retreat." Speaking of Work and Apostleship, he wrote (p. 331): "Only in the rare instances in which the inspiration of God calls a tried heart to a solitary life of prayer, is work altogether dispensed with or reduced to the smallest proportions; for then the servant of God is called to an immediate intercourse with the Creator, which is both more holy and more advantageous to the human race

than any labor could be, whether of speech or of ministration."

To the carnal-minded this estimate of the value of prayer may savor of exaggeration, but it is the estimate of the saints, who are wise with the wisdom of God. And we should have no difficulty in trusting those who speak calmly and deliberately, and are spiritually enlightened.

Let us, then, accept and act upon their verdict, until we have advanced far along the road of perfection. Then we shall find no difficulty in seeing the truth for ourselves. Until then we must take it, as we have to take so much else, on faith.

I will close this chapter with an extract from the works of the great Cardinal Newman, in which he points out one immense advantage which prayer may claim over other good works. In his "Sermons" (III, p. 365), speaking on Intercession, he thus expresses himself: "By words and works we can but teach or influence a few; by our prayers we may benefit the whole world and every individual in it, high and low, friends, stranger and enemy. Is it not fearful then to look back upon our past lives even in this one respect? How can we tell but that our king, our country, our Church, our institutions, and our own respective circles would be in far

happier circumstances than they are, had we been in the practice of more earnest and serious prayer for them? How can we complain of difficulties, national or personal, how can we justly blame and denounce evil-minded and powerful men, if we have but lightly used the intercessions offered up? . . . How can we answer to ourselves for the souls who have in our time lived and died in sin; the souls that have been lost and are now waiting for judgment, the infidel, the blasphemer, the profligate, the covetous, the extortioner, or those again who have died with but doubtful signs of faith, the deathbed penitent, the worldly, the double-minded, the ambitious, the unruly, the trifling, the self-willed, etc., seeing that, for what we know, we were ordained to influence or reverse their present destiny and have not done it."

CHAPTER VI

VOCAL PRAYER: THE DIVINE OFFICE

"Without Me you can do nothing" (John, xv. 5).

SPEAKING generally, it may be laid down as a principle that the sanctity of a priest will depend on the greater or less perfection with which he fulfills his various duties. Now the greatest and most important of his duties are his Mass, his Office, and his meditation. These three duties, properly and regularly carried out, will enable him to lead a truly priestly life here, and will secure for him everlasting happiness in the world to come.

We have already spoken of the Mass, of meditation and prayer *in general,* so now we will say something concerning the Divine Office in particular.

In the first place, we may form some idea of its immense importance by considering the very grave obligation we lie under of reciting it day by day. The Church, directed by the Holy Spirit of God, not only counsels and encourages

us to say our Office, but commands us to do so under the heaviest penalties. She declares that any priest, not legitimately dispensed, who should deliberately omit to say his Breviary even for one day, is guilty of mortal sin. In fact, she says a good deal more than that; she lays it down, without any doubt, that any priest who shall omit, not only one of the Little Canonical Hours, but even a notable part of the longer Hours, is guilty of grievous sin. "Any person who is bound by this law sins gravely if he culpably omits to recite a notable part of the Divine Office. As a notable part is regarded a whole Hour (even one of the Little Hours such as Terce or None), or a continuous passage equivalent to a whole Hour" (Génicot, "Theol. Moral.").

Now our holy Mother, the Church, would certainly not have annexed such tremendous penalties to any slight omission of this duty, if she did not attach the very greatest importance to it. She would never have laid this obligation upon us, *under threat of eternal damnation,* did she not look upon it as of quite exceptional moment. Let us then enter into her views, and realize as fully as we can what a serious duty we have undertaken, and try to discharge it to the best of our power.

The Divine Office is not a matter of private devotion. It is an official act. If the Church as a whole is the mystical body of Christ, then the clergy form the chief part of that body. They represent the faithful as they stand before the throne of God. They have to intercede for them, render God thanks for them, call down God's blessings upon them, and praise and glorify God in their name. In this way a perpetual and never-ceasing chorus of praise rises up night and day before the majesty of God.

Who shall count the hundreds of thousands of bishops, priests, monks, and nuns scattered at this moment throughout the world? The number must be vast indeed. Yet each one of this vast host has to recite the Divine Office every day of his or her life. Though it may be difficult for us to see them all even in our imagination, yet God and His saints, who look down upon them from above, see and recognize them as one vast and beautiful choir, ever reciting the praises of God. The sun is always shining in some part of the world. If night reigns in one hemisphere, it is broad day in another. And, wherever the sun may happen to be shining, there are hundreds of fervent priests and religious, both men and women, chanting the various Hours of the Office. In

their constancy, even if not in their attention and devotion, they seem to be emulating the very angels in heaven, who, we are told, sing without ceasing the glories and praises of God.

Is it not a great honor to be a fully accredited and recognized member of such a unique choir? Should it not cheer and encourage us to feel that we are not singing alone, but that we are actually uniting our feeble and unworthy voices to the voices of a vast number of others, very many of whom must be exceptionally holy and most dear to God? What a solace to a simple and humble priest—living perhaps alone in some small and hidden parish, seated (let us suppose) before the Blessed Sacrament in his little empty church, and devoutly reciting his Breviary —to know and to feel that all around him, in distant lands and in far-off cities, hundreds of thousands of generous and loving souls are (though he cannot now perceive them) uniting their voices with his, and uttering the self-same inspired words of holy David to the honor and glory of God.

If God is honored in this immense chorus, if in reply He sends countless blessings and graces down upon earth, if He opens the eyes of the spiritually blind and the ears of the spiritually deaf, and confers innumerable favors on the

Church at large—and of this there can be no doubt whatever—we at once understand the importance as well as the efficacy of this continual and united prayer, and rejoice to think that we too, in spite of our unworthiness, are living and active members.

With such thoughts occupying our mind, we at once begin to recognize the need of entering upon this sacred duty with attention, devotion, and fervor, and will resolve, to the best of our power, to render ourselves worthy of such a sublime ministry and to perform our share in the great work with all possible perfection.

We shall be still further inspired to make this effort by reason of the very nature of the Breviary which we hold in our hands. For the Breviary is no ordinary book. It has been most carefully compiled by saintly men, under the authority of the Church, especially for the use of her sacred ministers. It is full of interest and instruction, and is made up in great part of words inspired by the Holy Ghost, so that, to that extent at least, we may say that it is written by the hand of God.

It is made up of several different parts. Let us observe in the first place that we are presented every day with a short extract from the Gospel, together with an explanation or com-

mentary taken from some learned and saintly Doctor or Pope or bishop, such as St. Bede, St. Gregory the Great, or St. Augustine. We are also given a brief sketch of the life of the particular confessor, virgin, martyr, founder of an Order, etc., whose feast we are celebrating. His portrait is carefully drawn for us in a few pithy words, and we are stirred up by the force of his example to a more vigorous pursuit of virtue and perfection. There is no better way of growing in sanctity than to live day by day with the great saints, to breathe their atmosphere, and to witness their wonderful devotion to prayer, their intense love of God, their ardent practice of mortification, and their utter indifference to riches, honors and the opinion of the world. While their intense spirituality is set before us when reading in the Second Nocturn of each day's Matins, we are filled with admiration for them.

From admiration it is but a short step to imitation; and we soon begin to ask ourselves whether we cannot be, if not as generous and as magnanimous as they, at least less selfish and less ungenerous with God than we are. In the saints, even in the greatest of them, we recognize men and women just like ourselves. They were formed of the same flesh and blood,

they were exposed to the same difficulties as we are, they had the same enemies to overcome, the same evil inclinations to resist, and yet they became great saints. Why should not we? It may be urged that the saints had great graces to help them, and were wonderfully helped by God. Have we not all the means that they had? Have we not prayer, the Holy Mass and the Sacraments, and every other means within our reach, which enabled the saints to be what they were? Has God changed? Is He either less willing or less able to help us? Perish the thought! No, God's hands are not shortened, nor is He less generous in dealing out His gifts. If we are not saints, it is because we have not the real will to be saints. We are not ready to make the requisite sacrifices and deny ourselves in all things. We have not the ambition, nor have we the courage that is needed. But, by keeping the noble example of the saints and martyrs ever before us, the Church does all she can to stimulate our zeal and to entice us to follow them.

If the Divine Office did nothing else but keep the example of the saints before our eyes, it would serve an admirable and a most practical purpose. But it does much more: it teaches us how to pray, and suggests the thoughts and

sentiments, the longings and the aspirations that should fill our soul, when we kneel before the mercy-throne of God, and lift up our voices to heaven in earnest supplications. In the Psalms, which are put into our mouths by the authority of the Church, we possess the most perfect form of prayer, suitable too for every conceivable occasion, no matter what may be our actual state or condition of mind at the time. The Psalms are like some wonderful spiritual harp or other instrument of many strings, breathing forth the purest spiritual melodies, and carrying our thoughts along with them, now rising, now falling, like the notes of some celestial harmony, ever changing yet ever beautiful. One moment we are filled to overflowing with joy and gladness, praising and glorifying God, and calling on sun and moon and every other creature to join with us in extolling His holy name; the next moment we are perhaps weeping bitterly over our sins, and proclaiming our unworthiness to so much as invoke the name of God, and asking to be washed yet more from our iniquities, and to be more fully cleansed from our sins, till we are made "whiter than snow." In one Psalm we find ourselves imploring forgiveness of our offenses; in the next perhaps we are sighing and lamenting because

our sojourn in this valley of tears is prolonged, and imploring to be dissolved and to be at rest. Then, as we pass to another Psalm, we find ourselves, as it were, transported to the doleful scenes of Christ's Passion and Death. We hear Him asking if there be no one to share His sorrow, or if He must "tread the winepress alone." We see His hands and feet "dug with iron nails, His head crowned with thorns, and His sacred Body stretched upon the cross." Our hearts are touched with grief for the wounds we have caused, and we break out into: "Miserere mei, Deus, secundum magnam misericordiam tuam." But, though we feel bowed down to the earth with very grief and shame, yet again the clouds break, and we find our hearts stirred with fresh hope and confidence, as we cry: "In Domino confido," or "Dominus illuminatio mea, et salus mea," or "Exaltabo Te, Domine, quoniam suscepisti me. Jubilate Deo, omnis terra, servite Domino in lætitia. Laudate nomen ejus; quoniam suavis est Dominus, in æternum misericordia ejus."

In fact, we shall find joy and sorrow, hope and fear, deep humility and boundless confidence, a disregard for earth and a vehement longing for heaven, all mingling and blending together in the inspired Psalms, almost like the

chords in some beautiful musical composition. Indeed, there is no state either of exultation or depression, of cheerfulness or dejection, of peace or tribulation, or any other sentiment to which we are liable, that we shall not find expressed in the inspired words of holy David, and indeed far more clearly and feelingly than we could express them ourselves.

In this way, we are never at a loss. For, as St. Paul tells us: "The Holy Spirit also helpeth our infirmity; for we know not what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself asketh for us, with unspeakable groanings" (Rom., viii. 26). And, in employing the very words inspired by that same Holy Spirit, we may feel sure not only that what we ask for is pleasing to God, but also that it is expressed as He would wish. Can any thought be more consoling to us priests, who are bound to devote a considerable time each day to reciting our Office!

As the recitation of the Breviary is one of the most important as well as one of the most constant duties of our state, we should be particularly careful to discharge it in a befitting manner. Just consider the difference it will make to a priest at the end of a long life whether he has offered up this holocaust of prayer day by day *digne, attente ac devote,* or

the reverse; whether each day's Office has been bringing down upon him and his flock graces and blessings innumerable, and storing up a greater and yet a greater accumulation of merit, or has, on the contrary, been performed in such an off-hand, slovenly, careless manner as to offend God and excite His indignation. Such an abuse of holy things will bring him a curse rather than a blessing, according to the words: "Cursed be he who doth the work of the Lord deceitfully" (Jer., xlviii. 10).

The Reverend A. Barry O'Neill, C.S.C., speaking of the Holy Mass and the Divine Office ("Priestly Practice," p. 99), points out very truly: "The recitation of the Canonical Hours is clearly the more liable to be performed with precipitancy, carelessness, voluntary distractions, and an inattention so marked as to vitiate the whole act, making a mockery of prayer and insulting the God whom the Office is meant to honor. In the celebration of Mass, the circumstance of place, the special dress, and the movements, rites and ceremonies conspire to impress the priest with the tremendous significance of the adorable Sacrifice which he is offering; while the awful reality of the presence of Jesus Christ in the consecrated Host lying before him on the corporal, or taken up into his

hands, is ordinarily sufficient to fix the attention of the average cleric, and superinduce the reverence demanded of him at the altar. The abscence of such solemn adjuncts in the private recitation of the Divine Office, and the latitude allowed to the reciter as to time, place, and posture, make concentrated attention a matter of greater difficulty, increase the danger of disrespect and indevotion, and less readily prevent the deplorable lapse into mere soulless routinism."

This is all perfectly true, and puts us under a more serious obligation to guard against any slackness and willful inattention.

Perhaps the most frequent and obvious cause of indevotion is the precipitancy with which so many priests say their Breviary. They are naturally, for the most part, busy men. They have a considerable number of duties of one kind or another to get through within twenty-four hours, so that a strong resolution is required to enable them to devote all the time required to perform this "opus Dei" in a respectful and reverential manner. But, with many of them, this resolution is by no means strong, and the result is that they "do the work of God deceitfully," and bring down upon themselves a curse, instead of

a blessing. In place of regarding it as an honor and a privilege to address the majesty of God, and to speak to Him humbly and attentively as a lowly creature should converse with the infinite Creator, their chief aim seems to be to get through the "irksome labor and daily recurring drudgery" with all possible speed. To hear some clerics recite the Divine Office, one feels that, to be consistent, they ought to alter some of the words. Instead of saying so frequently: *Deus in adjutorium meum intende. R. Domine ad adjuvandum me festina,* they should say: *Domine, ad festinandum me adjuva.* We should certainly never think of gabbling in such an indecorous manner, were we permitted an audience with some earthly king or magnate. How much less should we act with such indignity when addressing the King of kings and the Lord of lords!

Consider further the irreparable loss which we sustain, when we fail to discharge this solemn obligation as we ought. The Breviary, when well said, brings us light and spiritual knowledge (*Accedite ad Dominum et illuminamini*), and also preserves us from sin. *Magna armatura est enim oratio.* And, if this be true of all prayer, it is especially so of the prayers com-

posed by the Holy Ghost and offered up in cheerful obedience to the Church's decrees. *Nihil tam officium, quam divinum.*

To recite the Canonical Hours as we ought, we must make use of all the means within reach, and should enter upon the task with a real desire to acquit ourselves well. To help us in this matter, it will be useful to consider the following suggestions, which I will leave each one to develop as he thinks fit:

(1) Before starting, we should spend at least a minute or two in preparation. If we begin by placing ourselves in the presence of God, and reflect upon the infinite power and majesty of Him with whom we are about to hold converse, we shall surely dismiss all mundane thoughts from our minds without much difficulty. We should then say with fervor the *Aperi Domine,* with a strong desire that God, in His goodness, would free our hearts *ab omnibus vanis et alienis cogitationibus,* and so forth. Then we should begin the Office prescribed for the day

(2) In the second place, we should excite within ourselves a very distinct idea of the immense importance and value of the task before us, as well as of the innumerable fruits, graces, blessings, and favors we shall obtain from our most generous Lord both for ourselves and for

the world at large, if only we perform our duty with fervor and recollection. *Confitebor tibi in toto corde meo, quoniam audisti verba oris mei.* The more vividly we grasp the importance and the efficacy of this great public prayer, now being offered up by hundreds of thousands all over the world, the more earnest and the more attentive we shall become in taking our share in it.

(3) Our third suggestion is that we should in spirit unite ourselves with our divine Master, and pray, not only in His own words, but with His voice, for "he that abideth in Me, and I in him, the same beareth much fruit" (John, xv. 5). In fact, we should never forget that Christ is our head, and that we are His members, thus forming but one body, "for in one Spirit were we all baptized into one body" (I Cor., xii. 13). We shall never doubt the value of our Office, if we realize that Christ Himself is praying to His heavenly Father with us. Then we may truly exclaim: "The words that I speak to you, I speak not of myself" (John, xiv. 10), and therefore my unworthiness will not spoil my prayer.

(4) Another help to recollection we shall find in always proposing to ourselves some particular intention. Instead of, or rather as well

as offering our prescribed prayers for the Church in general, we should form some more special and personal intention. There will always be found intentions of that kind in every parish. There may be some particular member of our flock who is giving us cause for anxiety, or there is this or that individual whom we cannot get to make his Easter confession, or there are the sick, and the ignorant, or the very poor in whom we are interested. Then let us direct our intention accordingly. Or perhaps we are having special sermons, or a mission, or a retreat in our district, and wish to call down God's grace in a special manner on all who attend.

In fact, there will always be endless intentions to choose from; the only difficulty will be in making the selection. Besides praying for all the graces we need for ourselves and for those committed to our charge, we should pray also for (*a*) the sick, (*b*) the dying, (*c*) the souls in purgatory, (*d*) the grievously afflicted, (*e*) the severely tempted, and a host of others who stand in great need of spiritual assistance. If we place before us any one of these special intentions, and really wish to come to the help of those in difficulty, we shall pray with greater earnestness and with much increased attention.

(5) A fifth suggestion is that we should endeavor to acquire a more perfect knowledge of the meaning of the inspired words of the Psalms which we use (*Qui legit intelligat*). It is very difficult to be interested or to keep one's attention fixed for long, if one is repeating words which convey no sense or meaning that *we* can discover. Yet this will inevitably be the case, unless we devote some time to studying the various commentators, and do our best to read what learned saints and doctors have said and written on the Psalms of David. It is true that many of the Psalms are simple enough, and may be appreciated even by the most ordinary reader, but a considerable number are far from easy to understand. They are full of deep significance and hidden wisdom, which require both time and serious study before it is possible to extract from them the rich gold which they contain. But, if a priest will religiously take time to penetrate their meaning and will consult competent authorities and commentators, he will find himself amply rewarded, not merely by reason of the greater spiritual insight and knowledge so acquired, but also by reason of the much increased facility with which he will say his Office and keep his attention fixed. *Ipse videat.*

(6) The sixth suggestion has to do with our

modus operandi. There can be no doubt whatsoever that we are so constituted that the body affects the soul and the soul the body. A man who is thoroughly humble conducts himself, even externally, in a manner very different to that in which a haughty, vainglorious man will conduct himself. And the very pose of the body helps to accentuate the interior disposition of the mind, whether for good or for evil. In the parable of the publican and the Pharisee this is well brought out. The Pharisee takes up a prominent place in the Temple and stands erect, whereas the poor humble publican standing "afar off, would not so much as lift up his eyes towards heaven." He even "strikes his breast" in order to arouse within himself a deeper sense of his misery and unworthiness; in short, the humility of his heart throws him into an attitude of self-abasement, while the attitude of self-abasement helps him to realize more vividly his deep, utter unworthiness.

Now, if we are to recite our Office with becoming reverence and attention, it would greatly assist us to assume a humble attitude and to choose both a time and a place as free as possible from distractions. When our divine Master and model addressed His heavenly Father in prayer, He showed His profound respect and

veneration even in the position He took up. So that we meet such expressions as the following in the Holy Scriptures: "And kneeling down He prayed" (Luke, xxii. 41); "He fell upon His face, praying" (Matt., xxvi. 39), etc., etc.

Many of the saints were accustomed to recite all the Canonical Hours on their knees, and some made a rule to perform this holy exercise always, when at all possible, in the church, and in presence of the Blessed Sacrament. But alas! there are a great number of priests who do not imitate them even from afar. Many do not even sit up properly, but loll about and recline in a most lazy attitude, perhaps even with their feet up and without any outward sign of respect.

If we must sit, let us at all events sit up in a decent manner, and let us choose a quiet spot, away from all noise and distractions and probable interruptions. No one can expect to discharge this most important and sacred duty as he ought, unless he guards against distractions, and unless he takes up a respectful attitude. We cannot, of course, always select the most appropriate time, but even here the habit of some priests leaves much to be desired. How frequently one finds priests putting off the recitation of their Breviary until they are tired and

sleepy, and incapable of bestowing all the attention to it which it deserves. How often do they leave it till the night is far advanced, and there is really not time left before midnight to get through it either *digne*, or *attente*, or *devote*.

Other suggestions might be made, but, if even these few are carefully attended to, we shall certainly begin to say the Divine Office with greater fruit, with greater merit, and with far greater satisfaction to ourselves. And remember, if we really and truly desire the end, we must be ready to make use of the means.

CHAPTER VII

ON SANCTITY IN GENERAL

"And you . . . He hath reconciled in the body of His Flesh through death, to present you holy and unspotted, and blameless before Him" (Col., i. 21–22).

WE have already spoken very strongly on the necessity of sanctity in a priest. But what is sanctity? Before a captain steers his ship out of the peaceful harbor into the trackless sea, it is essential that he should know whither it is that he wishes to guide it. He must make a close study of the chart, and ascertain the exact latitude and longitude of the port for which he is bound. Otherwise, he may sail and sail all the seas over, and yet never reach his true objective. Or, to take a somewhat different example, an archer who is ambitious to carry off the prize in a shooting competition must take a long and steady look at the target, before he allows the arrow to speed from the bow. He must fix his gaze on the bull's eye, and be able to see its exact position; for otherwise he gives

himself no chance of piercing it. To shoot merely somewhere in the direction, or to have but a vague and uncertain idea as to its exact position, is to invite certain disaster and failure.

The same general principle holds good in the case of every human effort, even in the case of one who is aiming at perfection. The first duty of such a person is to satisfy himself that he knows precisely what that really is which he wishes to reach, because otherwise he may make the most valiant efforts, and yet never draw any nearer the goal. *Magni passus, sed extra viam* (great strides, but off the right track).

It will clear away misconceptions and render our task considerably lighter, if we begin our investigations by first laying down certain principles.

Principle I. All men without exception receive the general invitation to be saints. The words of our Lord: "Be ye holy, as your heavenly Father is holy," are very explicit, and are evidently addressed to all those of whom God is the Father. But God is the Father of all men; therefore, all are called upon to be holy, even as He is holy—not of course in degree, which is impossible, but in kind. That is to say, they are called to be holy with His holiness. "The same precepts and counsels of holiness,"

says St. Chrysostom, "are given to all men without distinction by our divine Lord. He addressed the Beatitudes to all without distinction; and the command to love God 'with our whole heart and mind and strength,' as well as the injunction to be perfect 'as our heavenly Father is perfect,' were addressed to all. Whenever our Lord intends to make a limitation, He expresses that limit clearly, as when speaking of virginity He says: 'All do not take this word: let them who can take it, take it!' So too St. Paul said: 'Concerning virginity, I have no command of the Lord, but I give counsel!' Hence the golden-mouthed Saint concludes that all are called to a perfect life, although the monastical is the most secure" (cfr. Bishop Ullathorne, "Ecclesiastical Discourses," pp. 129–130).

Now, as soon as it is admitted that all men of every rank and station and profession are invited to be holy, a certain necessary consequence is seen at once to follow. This brings us to:

Principle II. Whatever be the essence and kernel of holiness, it must most certainly consist of something that lies well within the reach of all, otherwise indeed the foregoing words of infallible truth would be meaningless and ab-

surd. In fact, if any individual were so situated that he could not become holy, we should be simply driven to the conclusion that that particular individual, at all events, was not called to perfection. For to invite a man to do what is known to be wholly out of his power to do, is to make a mockery of him. But, as a matter of fact, no human creature can ever find himself so situated.

(1) We might ask ourselves: Does sanctity consist in prolonged prayers and nightly vigils? Evidently not. If it did, a vast number of excellent persons, occupied in business and professional duties, would be excluded.

(2) Does it consist of most severe penances and prolonged macerations—in wearing the hair-shirt and taking the discipline, and sleeping on bare boards? Again we reply: Impossible, for multitudes by reason of ill-health or delicate or broken constitutions, or even by reason of the exceptionally arduous nature of their employments, are physically incapable of undertaking such austerities, which would further reduce their strength. They might even be doing wrong in attempting it. Yet, as we have said, sanctity is for all.

(3) Neither does sanctity consist in bestowing abundant alms, or in building churches,

schools, orphanages, asylums and so on; for how can the poor do such things? Yet "theirs is the kingdom of heaven"! All these practices, enumerated above, are of course exceedingly useful, where they are possible and where they may be prudently permitted by a wise director; and in some measure and under some circumstances they may be even necessary, but only as a means, and never as an end. But, in order to exhaust the subject, let us ask:

(4) Can we say that sanctity consists in converting sinners, and in drawing thousands into the Church, or in great missionary enterprises and apostolic works?

(5) Does it consist in the possession of wonderful supernatural gifts, such as prophecy, or in the working of miracles and prodigies? Of course not. Such things are in the power of no one, and, when exercised, are exercised only in virtue of an exceptional and wholly gratuitous gift of God, who sometimes bestows them upon those who are by no means holy, and who often, on the other hand, withholds them from those whom we all recognize as among the greatest of the saints—such, for instance, as St. Joseph and Our Lady herself, of whom no direct miracles are recorded, at least during their life upon earth.

Consequently, in seeking the true essence of sanctity, we must exclude all the foregoing. Not one of these things taken singly, nor all of them taken together, form the essence or kernel of sanctity, for, as we have already pointed out, the essence of solid sanctity must be of such a character as to lie well within the grasp of every poor child of earth, however situated, who can gaze up into the loving face of God above, and cry out in the divinely instituted formula: "Our Father, who art in heaven!"

We know, without any doubt, that rich and poor, learned and ignorant, the healthy and bedridden, the old and the young, may all without exception grasp and securely retain this precious pearl of sanctity by merely courageously and earnestly seeking it in the manner prescribed by the Church of God.

What then is sanctity, in its very root? At first glance, it seems to be most complicated and to be made up of quite a multitude of different duties, devotions, and religious observances. Yet, in sober truth, nothing is simpler. Just as countless different movements in earth, sea, and air, and an infinite number of marvelous processes such as the ebb and flow of the tides, and the complicated courses of the unnumbered stars and meteors and other heavenly bodies, which

seem so exceedingly involved, are all easily accounted for and explained by the presence of one single force (namely, gravity), so in the spiritual order the innumerable acts and processes and practices of the spiritual life may all be accounted for and explained by one single law —and that is *the law of love.*

If we come to study the question thoroughly, we shall at last, without the shadow of a doubt, reach the conclusion that all genuine supernatural sanctity consists radically and essentially in nothing else than the love of God. And that is surely something which is most evidently within the reach of every one.

And further, if sanctity is love, it then follows that great sanctity is great love; and that the highest sanctity is the intensest love; and that infinite sanctity is infinite love. God alone can possess infinite sanctity, because God alone can and does love Himself with an infinite love. "God is charity" (I John, iv. 8). Were it possible for a creature to love God infinitely, he too would be infinitely holy. But this by its very nature is impossible, since the creature is necessarily limited by the limitations of its being.

That the essence of sanctity is love, is sufficiently indicated by the answer which Jesus Christ gave to a certain doctor of the law, who

asked Him: "Master, which is the great commandment of the law? Jesus said to him: Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind" (Matt., xxii. 36-37).

Here all that Christ explicitly commands is love: the love of God, and that which, after all, is not a distinct command but only a corollary—the love of our neighbor. For, as St. John asks: "If we love not our neighbor, whom we see, how can we love God, whom we do not see?" If we love God aright, we must love our neighbor also, because the one love includes the other.

The selfsame truth is also contained in the following words of St. John: "God is charity, and he that abideth in charity, abideth in God and God in him" (I John, iv. 16). All that the Apostle demands of us in this sentence is charity, or the love of God. To possess such love is to "abide in God," and to have "God abiding in us." But to be so united with the infinite source of all holiness, is to be holy. The great St. Thomas simply draws out and explains the same doctrine when he argues as follows: "Everything is more perfect in proportion as it reaches its proper end," but it is charity that unites us to God, who is "our proper end." Hence it follows that we are more or less per-

fect, according as we possess more or less charity. And Suarez writes: "Theologians usually agree with St. Thomas in making the perfection of Christian life consist in the perfection of charity alone" (*De Perf.*, I, iii). Fra E. Chitignano, in his "L'Uomo in Paradiso" (p. 123) writes: "A wise man of the Church of God has said: he who is more ardent in love, is richer in merit, and he who is richer in merit, will be higher in glory"—which is really stating the same doctrine in a somewhat different way.

This leads us to a most important point in our treatise, *viz.*, the duty of forming a short and clear-cut definition of love. Since the whole essence and the very marrow of sanctity is to love the infinitely Lovable, any mistake here must be fraught with the most disastrous consequences. Let us then begin by considering in what love does not consist. It does not consist in anything external. It is not made up of sighs and tears, nor of striking attitudes. Love is not feeling, or emotion, or poetry. Such things may sometimes accompany true love and be manifestations of it, but they form no part of its essence, any more than the steam and thick smoke issuing from a steam-engine form essential parts of its motive power. The love of God that we are seeking is something far

deeper, immeasurably more searching, and infinitely more practical, as we shall now attempt to show.

All true love, even mere human love, consists in union. It is commonly defined as the "union of two hearts." But, since the heart is here used merely as a symbol of the affections, it may more correctly be defined as the "union of two wills." The supernatural love, with which we are now alone concerned, is (like natural love) the union of two wills; but, in this case, the union is not between two human wills, but between a human will (the will of man) and a divine will (the will of God).

So soon as ever a created will, whether of man or of angel, is firmly and irrevocably fixed and riveted to the divine will in such wise that the created will follows the divine as a shadow follows a substance, and moves at all times in complete harmony with it, the person who owns that will clearly deserves the title of saint. Let us develop this thought a little more fully.

Almighty God is the limitless and supreme Good, infinite in every conceivable perfection, the one boundless ocean of all sanctity. Now His divine will, in so far as it is manifested to us, is but the outward expression of His own inward perfection. What He wills must neces-

sarily be good, because infinite Goodness cannot will what is evil. In fact, His will must be not only perfect, but infinitely perfect; consequently, in so far as we keep our finite wills in complete accord with His infinite will, in the same measure shall we share in His holiness. This stands to reason; for, since His will is the standard and the measure of all possible perfection, it follows that in so far as a human will conforms to it, runs parallel to it, identifies itself with it, and as it were loses itself in it, in that same degree will it also approach perfection. If God's will be represented by an infinite and absolutely straight line, then our wills, represented by finite lines, will be also absolutely straight in so far as they run parallel to it. On the other hand, every departure, every deflection from it, even were it but by a hair's breadth, must to that extent err from the direct line and fall short of perfection. To conform our wills in all things to God's will, is the only true and practical proof of love; but it is also the only true and practical proof of sanctity.

This truth is implied over and over again in the inspired pages of Holy Writ. The most elementary test of love, even in its initial stages, is a readiness to accomplish the divine will. It is the test applied by our Lord Himself. "If

you love Me, keep My commandments" (John, xiv. 15). For His commandments are the solemn and open declaration of His will. They reveal to us what His desire is regarding both Himself and our neighbor. So again, in another place, He cries out: "If any man love Me, he will keep My word" (John, xiv. 23)—which is only another manner of saying: "To love Me is to hearken to My instructions and to carry out My will."

We will conclude this chapter with a very apposite paragraph from Père Grou, S.J., who writes: "God will give Himself to man only in the proportion that man gives himself to God. All for all" (p. 188). Then he develops the statement in the following words: "That which glorifies God is not what I do for Him myself out of my own head, and from the impulse of nature, but that which He Himself does in me and by me. All He asks of me is an absolute devotion of self, a disposition to obey without limit, a will to refuse Him nothing, to resist Him in nothing, but to allow Him to rule over me exactly according to His good pleasure. . . . Whether I do great things or little, is indifferent to Him, as long as I do what He wills. His will alone gives things their value. He esteems them only from this point of view. The act

by which we give ourselves to Him without reserve, is, properly speaking, the only one that gives Him glory; all the rest is merely the consequence of this great act and its practical result, and draws from that act of self-immolation its merit. . . . I know not God's designs upon myself, but I know for certain that they will remain unfulfilled unless I give myself entirely to Him. . . . My holiness entirely depends on procuring for God the special glory He designed me to give Him" (p. 190).

In his "Spiritual Conferences," Father F. W. Faber writes (p. 406): "Holiness consists simply of two things, two endeavors—the endeavor to know God's will and the endeavor to do it when we know it. Hence, holiness is well within the reach of even the weakest and the humblest of us, and demands nothing more than a strong and persevering determination to acquire it at any cost."

CHAPTER VIII

ON LOVE AND ITS EFFECTS

"For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments" (I John, v. 3).

WHAT is the definition of sanctity? As we pointed out in our last article, sanctity is the *love of God*. Once this definition is admitted, it follows that great sanctity is great love, and that the greatest sanctity is the greatest love. But here we must be most careful to distinguish real love from its many counterfeits, and to remember that the love of which we speak is not feeling, or emotion, or poetry, or anything of that sort, but simply complete and perfect union between the created will of man, on the one hand, and the uncreated and eternal will of God, on the other.

Now, if our contention be true, it will be easy to prove it. How? By applying the principle to Jesus Christ, for He is not only our Redeemer, but also our most perfect Model and Example: "Learn of Me. I am the way, the truth and the life."

Our Lord is the absolutely perfect. As a consequence, His sanctity, like our own, will assuredly be manifested likewise by the most complete and invariable conformity of His human will to the will of His heavenly Father. This we find, on examination, to be the case. Obedience in great things as in small, in things painful and arduous as well as in things easy and pleasant, forms the dominant note of His whole life. Ages before He was born this was pointed out as His most marked characteristic. "In the head of the book it is written of Me that I should do Thy will, O my God" (Ps., xxxix. 9). Why was this said? Because nothing higher could be said. When He actually appears in the flesh, He repeats the same thing of Himself: "I came down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him that sent Me" (John, vi. 38). Furthermore, in order to impress His hearers with its vital importance, He even refers to it as His very food. For, as the body cannot live without material food, neither can the soul live its supernatural life without spiritual food. What is this food of the soul? It is precisely the doing of God's holy will. Hence our divine Lord expressly says: "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me" (John, iv. 34). In another place He

says: "I do always the things that please Him" (John, viii. 29).

Christ was not only a saint, but the Saint of saints, just as He is the Lord of lords and the King of kings. Hence, as sanctity is complete conformity of will, we find that He exhibited the most absolutely perfect conformity of His human will with the will of His heavenly Father, not only in what is according to human nature, but even in duties from which nature shrinks with instinctive horror and dismay, such as humiliation, sufferings of body, anguish of mind, torment and death. "He became obedient unto death," writes the Apostle, "even to the death of the cross" (Phil., ii. 8). When the hour of His Passion was approaching and all the disgrace and humiliation and anguish of that most awful event presented itself with the utmost vividness before His mind, He threw Himself down upon His knees and had recourse to prayer. And, because He was truly man as well as truly God, His whole human nature was stirred and deeply troubled and in cruel torture by reason of the thought of His impending doom, so that "He began to grow sorrowful and to be sad" (Matt., xxvi. 37). This feeling of dread and apprehension and alarm, this natural shrinking from public shame, dire

disgrace, excruciating pain and a malefactor's death, was no sin, nor any imperfection. No, no more than His sensitiveness to physical pain was sin when the scourge tore open His back, or when the iron nails were driven through His quivering hands and feet. Had there been any imperfection whatsoever in feeling and realizing the greatness of the sacrifice which obedience demanded, then Christ, the infinitely perfect, could not have exclaimed, as He did: "My soul is sorrowful even unto death" (Matt., xxvi. 38). But, if this keen sensitiveness to pain was no sin, the ready and unhesitating acceptance of it and of all that it implied because it was the will of His eternal Father, was the exercise of the most heroic virtue.

This is a lesson for all of us. For feelings are not under our own control, and we may often experience a strong natural repugnance to accept God's decrees, even in spite of ourselves and without any moral guilt. Consequently, to encourage us and to show us that He did indeed share our nature and was "like to us in all things, excepting sin," He allowed us to look into His human soul and to see that He too shared that repugnance, although all the while His human will, the seat of all merit, was unswervingly united and in complete harmony

with the divine will. Hence the cry arising from His agonizing soul: "My Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from Me. Nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt" (Matt., xxvi. 39). We may often find our lower nature suffering and aggrieved and ready to rebel, but it matters not: so long as the superior part, the ruling and controlling will, never falters in its allegiance but courageously and consistently clings lovingly and closely to the divine will, the state of perfection is truly and fully maintained.

The summing up of the whole of this doctrine is beautifully expressed in that prayer which our blessed Lord taught His disciples, saying: "Thus therefore shall you pray: Our Father, etc." (Matt., vi. 9.) There is one petition in that prayer which contains, as it were in a nutshell, the whole marrow and essence of perfection: "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

When, addressing the infinitely perfect God, we express the strong desire of our hearts that His will may be done by us on earth as the blessed do it in heaven, we have reached the highwater mark of sanctity. We can go no further, except indeed by rendering this same desire more intense and more vehement.

God's commands may sometimes be very dif-

ficult, very trying and painful, and repugnant to nature, but, if only we can repeat, not with our lips only, but with the whole strength of our minds and hearts: "Thy will be done," we have done all that is possible for a creature to do to honor God and to prove our love.

If we expand the divine words a little, to bring out their meaning into greater prominence, we shall find ourselves exclaiming: "O infinitely holy Father, the unfailing source and the perennial fount of all true holiness, we ardently desire and pray that Thy most perfect will, and not our imperfect and wayward will, may be accomplished by us and in us; we desire not only that Thy will may be accomplished, but that it may be carried out as promptly, as perfectly, as lovingly, and as joyously as the very saints and angels do it in heaven."

Who is there that can truly and conscientiously utter such sentiments in the depth of his soul, and echo them throughout every fiber of his being, and not be worthy of the glorious title of saint?

As we have already remarked, sanctity is nothing more than the love of God. But it may be well to observe here that, if this love be genuine and strong, it will be quite enough, since it will include all else and will naturally

and of itself lead to the exercise of all those practices of piety which tend to increase it and intensify it still further. We will conclude this chapter by illustrating this statement by some examples.

In the first place, one who really loves is constantly thinking of the beloved one. Even in the natural order, a man who is in love with a girl will be ever thinking of her and calling her to mind. Though he may be occupied in business or in the duties of his profession, the thought of her will haunt him day and night, and be but very seldom out of his mind. He will love to dwell upon her words and her looks, and upon all she said and did during the happy hours when they last met, and anything connected with her possesses for him an interest and an importance difficult to measure.

Now, what is this when transferred to the supernatural order? In the case of the soul which is in love with God, it is called *meditation*. In proportion to our greater or lesser love, we shall be constantly thinking of God and calling Him to mind. We shall find ourselves wondering at His infinite majesty, His irresistible power, His indescribable beauty, His unparalleled love, and His absolute perfection. We shall turn over in our minds the various

events of His earthly life, and ponder over every act of His bitter Passion. In a word, once a soul is full of the love of God, it needs no one to teach it how to meditate. It will naturally and spontaneously occupy itself with thoughts of God's divine attributes, and of all He has done to prove the boundless depths of His love.

In the second place, take another important duty, *viz.*, prayer. Just as a young man in love with a girl wishes to be with her, to converse with her when present, and to write to her when absent, so a soul in love with God loves to call to mind His presence, and to speak to Him even as a bride speaks to the bridegroom. The precept to "pray always" (Luke, xviii. 1), to "pray without ceasing" (I Thess., v. 17), is easily fulfilled by a true lover of God.

In the case of the saints, we find a continuous intercourse going on between them and Almighty God. They seemed to realize His presence all the day long. They kept themselves united to Him by constant and fervent ejaculatory prayers, almost without interruption. With them it was not so much a duty as a delight to express the love burning in their hearts for their heavenly Bridegroom. Their love made them yearn after Him, and led them to seek

Him wherever He was to be found, more especially in the Church, where His humanity as well as His divinity dwells under the sacramental species. There they would prostrate themselves before the tabernacle, and often spend the whole night in most loving intercourse with the God who created them.

To the lukewarm, to the imperfect, and to those whose love is cold, such a life of prayer and mutual converse and union may seem unattractive, difficult, and even impossible. But show me a priest whose heart is on fire—show me one wholly consumed with the love of God —and I will show you one whose greatest joy and truest happiness is to think of and to converse with Him whom he recognizes as his first beginning and his last end. Yes, if *love* teaches us how to meditate, it teaches us also how to pray.

In the third place, one who loves another with his whole heart and soul is anxious to do all he can to please him, and to show his love. He will seek to promote his interests, and do all he can to further them. Thus, it is enough for a priest to be a true lover of Christ, and this love will transform him into a zealous missioner; he will try to coöperate with Christ to the utmost of his power in saving and sancti-

fying souls. Knowing that Christ not merely suffered, but died an agonizing death to rescue souls from hell-fire and to open to them the gates of paradise, he too will exert himself earnestly and loyally and to the utmost to bring about their salvation, and will be willing not only to toil and labor in the sublime work of the ministry, but even to endure suffering and pain—even death itself, should it be necessary —in order to save souls, and so win the gratitude and approval of his blessed Master, the divine Shepherd who actually laid down His life for His sheep.

In the fourth place, a great love of God will also reconcile any priest who possesses it to such poverty, hardship and difficulties as he may encounter on the mission. For whoever loves our Lord with a great and vehement love will be only too delighted to resemble Him. If he has to work in poor and mean surroundings, if he sometimes finds if difficult to make ends meet, if he is deprived of many comforts and luxuries, he will think of Him who was "born in a stable," who "had not whereon to lay His head," and who died naked and abandoned on the cross; and then, instead of complaining and murmuring, his very love will cause him to rejoice and be glad to share, at least in some

very small degree, the sufferings and privations endured by his divine Master for love of him.

In the fifth place, the priest who ardently loves and honors God in Himself will also love and honor Him in all those who represent or hold the place of God. Thus, he will love, honor and have the most profound respect for the Pope, the Vicar of Christ, and for his bishop, who shares so largely in the power of Christ, and for his fellow-priests, all of whom in one way or another are the representatives of God Incarnate.

He will extend his love even still further. He will love and have a special regard for the poor, the sorrowful, the sick, and the dying, because in all of these his love will find a certain likeness and image of Christ. He will love to help and console them and to minister to them in their needs, for he will feel that in that way he is really helping and consoling and ministering to Christ Himself, according to our Lord's own words: "Amen, I say to you, as long as you did it to one of these, My least brethren, you did it to Me" (Matt., xxv. 40).

In the sixth place, one who ardently loves our Lord will be found to take a lively interest in all that concerns Him. He will delight in

the ceremonies of the Church. He will see that everything on and about the sanctuary is as clean and spotless and as beautiful as possible. He will be careful to have the sanctuary lamp always burning, and will do all he can to encourage the faithful to bring fresh flowers and candles to adorn the altar. In a word, if he really possesses a strong personal love for his divine Master, he will spare no pains to adorn, enrich and beautify the church within which He dwells, and will exclaim, even with more fervor and certainly with more reason than David (to whom God's sacramental presence was unknown): "I have loved, O Lord, the beauty of Thy house, and the place where Thy glory dwelleth" (Ps., xxv. 8).

In the seventh place, if the priest be really full of the love of God, he will love what God loves, and despise and hate what God despises and hates. Thus, he will have a special reverence and devotion for the great Mother of God, and honor her beyond all other creatures, because Christ loved and honored her beyond all others. He will trust and confide in her, not only because of her sublime dignity and priceless worth, but more especially because his divine Master, whom he loves far more than himself, was pleased to bequeath her to him

in the person of St. John, when, dying in agony upon the cross, He said: "Behold thy mother." For a similar reason he will honor and love St. Joseph, Christ's foster-father, and the Apostles, especially St. Peter and St. John, whom our Lord treated with special favor.

In the eighth place, one who ardently loves our Lord will seek to resemble Him more and more in every detail. He will love little children, because Christ loved them; he will have the greatest compassion and pity for poor sinners, and will strive to imitate Christ's infinite patience and gentleness in dealing with them. Like Christ, too, he will despise honors and distinctions, will love to be unknown and even despised by men, and will care only for the approval and the blessing of his heavenly Father, whose mere smile of approval he will value infinitely more than even the deafening praise and flattery of the entire world.

Much—yes, very much—more might be said, but we have perhaps said enough to show how extended becomes the influence of love when once it is strong and deep and sincere. Love will teach us everything. Love will teach us how to meditate, how to pray, how to say our daily Mass, how to visit frequently the Blessed Sacrament, how to adorn the house of

God, how to bear the trials and sufferings of daily life, how to deal with all the different members of our flock, and how to honor God's faithful servants, and especially His Blessed Mother. In a word, love—strong, burning, personal love of God—is the most certain, the most direct, and the shortest way to a life of holiness and happiness in this world and to a life of close and eternal union with God in the next. Let us never cease to pray for an increase of this love. Let us long for it and desire it more and more earnestly as the years of life grow fewer. Let us beg the angels and the saints, and above all our special patrons, the Immaculate Mother and St. Joseph, to unite their voices with ours, so that God may listen to our prayer and breathe, as it were, on the expiring embers of our soul till a bright fire is enkindled that may burn up all the dross of sin and imperfection and leave nothing within our hearts but the pure gold of spotless charity.

In his "Devout Reflections" (p. 13), St. Alphonsus says: "All holiness consists in loving God," while Solomon tells us, in inspired words, that "divine love is an infinite treasure to men, which they that use, become the friends of God" (Wis., vii. 14).

CHAPTER IX

MORTAL SIN IN A PRIEST

"It is impossible for those who were once illuminated, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and are fallen away, to be renewed again to penance, crucifying again the Son of God and making Him a mockery" (Heb., vi. 4, 6).

THERE are some subjects which we scarcely like even to touch upon in reference to a priest, because they seem so *utterly* opposed to his whole character, so absolutely alien to his very state and condition, so peculiarly incongruous in one so exceedingly honored and so highly exalted by God. Among these subjects must be numbered mortal sin.

A priest is called by God to be "the light of the world." He is appointed to be a leader of God's army fighting against sin, and a living example of virtue to the whole of his flock, as well as their protector and defender. He has received such marvelous and such precious gifts and graces, and such supernatural powers have been conferred on him for the special purpose of

enabling him to oppose and overcome and destroy the empire of sin, that the mere thought of deliberate and grievous sin on the part of a priest gives us a terrible shock, and fills us, not only with horror, but with surprise and consternation. We feel the same sort of bewilderment and disappointment that we should feel in the natural order if the sun should suddenly give out darkness instead of light, or if salt should suddenly begin to corrupt what it touches, instead of preserving it.

Yet, alas, although we should like to regard mortal sin as an utter impossibility in the case of a priest and as something far too awful and appalling even to contemplate, yet a sad but undeniable experience compels us to acknowledge that even priests ("of whom I now tell you weeping," Phil., iii. 18) have been known to fall, and to fall grievously. Oh, horrible! horrible! most horrible!

We will make no attempt here to measure the measureless abyss of malice, baseness and ingratitude contained in every mortal sin. We leave that to our clerical readers to estimate and to ponder over for themselves. We know that no words can possibly describe a hundredth part of the filth and the fetor of sin, no matter by whom it may be committed. All we wish

to point out here is that, whatever may be the abysmal depth of malice, baseness and ingratitude of sin in an ordinary Christian, it is an immeasurably greater evil and an infinitely greater deformity in one solemnly consecrated to God as is a priest.

We have already enumerated various strong reasons why sanctity should characterize a priest. Now, every single reason that can be alleged to prove that a priest should lead a holier and a more saintly life than others, may also be urged to prove that any sin in him is more serious than the same sin would be in any one else.

Indeed, any one can see (*a*) that the fall of one who has been specially set apart for the express purpose of being an example and a mirror of sanctity to others is more serious than the same fall in one who has not been so selected, and (*b*) that a sin in one who is called to act as an *alter Christus* to the members of his flock is very much more blameworthy and disgraceful than the same sin would be in one not so called. And so on with all the rest. Each point should be considered carefully and separately. But what I wish to point out here is that, in addition to these, there are five other and very special reasons why a priest is more

guilty, and why he offers a greater insult to God when he sins, and is deserving of greater punishment, than one who is not a priest.

We will first merely state what they are, and will then briefly consider them, one by one. The sin of a priest is worse:

(1) because he sins against greater light;

(2) because he sins against a greater Benefactor;

(3) because he sins in spite of greater opportunities;

(4) because, when *he* sins, he gives far greater scandal;

(5) lastly, because his chances of recovery are much fainter and more difficult.

(1) The degree of malice in any sin depends upon many different circumstances. One of these is the degree of knowledge and advertence. Thus, one who breaks a command in *complete* ignorance may be excused altogether, but, the clearer a man's vision of the evil he is doing, the more responsible he becomes. Theologians tell us that God chose to redeem man rather than the fallen angels, because their bright penetrating intellects enabled them to realize the gravity of their crime far more accurately, and to estimate the depth of their in-

gratitude far more clearly than was possible for man. Though Adam and Eve had knowledge enough and were fully aware of what they were doing, yet the angels, being far more gifted, possessed an immeasurably clearer view. And *on that account* their sin was greater and more deserving of punishment. Hence, though man was offered another chance, the angels were left to suffer the consequences of their rebellion and were not redeemed.

When our blessed Lord prayed even for His executioners, He did so in view of their ignorance of what they were doing in crucifying the Son of God: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Now, many a poor sinner may find mercy on the same ground. Even (as in the case of our first parents) when the ignorance is not deep enough to excuse them altogether, how often it diminishes their guilt and renders God more ready to pardon and forget! But how can a priest hope for mercy on such ground? How can he plead ignorance? Is he not a teacher? Does he not lay down the law? Has he not been carefully trained from his earliest boyhood? He has spent long years studying philosophy and theology and the science of the saints. He has been carefully instructed, admonished, corrected and advised.

He is familiar with ascetical writers, and has read again and again the lives of the saints. He knows better than others the laws of God, the duty of obedience, the claims God has upon him, the gravity of mortal sin, and the severity of its punishments. His whole spiritual outlook is clearer, and his knowledge far more accurate and extensive upon all such points than is that of the ordinary layman. *And according to the measure of his knowledge will be the measure of his responsibility.* Whatever may be the magnitude of a sin in others, the self-same sin will be far greater in him, because he sins against greater light.

(2) When a priest sins, he commits a graver offense than others also because he sins against a greater Benefactor. Of all the millions of Christians in the world, who, we may well ask, has been so blessed, so honored, so highly privileged as a priest? God has selected him, and bestowed upon him gifts and graces and powers and prerogatives which no others can aspire to or exercise. There is no higher dignity on earth. It far excels that of the most powerful monarch. The power of kings and potentates, however great, is limited to this earth, whereas that of a priest extends into the next life and affects, not merely the temporal welfare of his

subjects, but their eternal wellbeing also. The king may open the gates of an *earthly* prison, but a priest is empowered to open even the *gates of hell,* and to raise not indeed the body, which is of small importance, but the soul itself from death to life! Furthermore, through the goodness of God, the priest has been given jurisdiction, not only over the mystical body of Christ, but even over His real Body in the Holy Eucharist. In short, God has drawn the priest to His Sacred Heart, and has treated him with a love, a generosity, and a condescension so unique and so unparalleled that even the very angels might envy him, were envy to be found in heaven. Just think, then, what a claim God has upon the generous, whole-hearted and devoted service of one so highly honored. To turn upon and to injure a perfect stranger who has never done us any harm, is bad enough. But to insult and injure and to seek the life of one from whom we have received the choicest gifts and the highest favors and privileges, is surely infinitely worse. Yet, a priest who sins grievously is just such a one. When he sins, he turns upon his greatest Benefactor, "crucifying to himself again the Son of God, and making Him a mockery" (Heb., vi. 6), in the strong words of the great Apostle, St. Paul.

We are told in St. John's Gospel (x. 31–32) that on one occasion, when the Jews took up stones to stone our blessed Lord, He turned towards them in sorrow, and said: "Many good works I have shewed you from My Father: for which of those works do you stone Me?"

Might He not turn towards a priest who is about to commit sin and ask with yet greater sorrow: "Many great and supernatural gifts have I bestowed upon you: for which of those precious gifts do you seek to crucify Me again, making Me a mockery?"

If mortal sin, even in a poor ignorant child who has never been properly instructed, and who has received nothing but the ordinary gifts that God bestows upon all His children, be deserving of eternal torments, what must be the punishment due to the sin of a priest, so fully instructed in his duty, and so loaded with all God's choicest gifts and graces, and so exalted and honored beyond all other men! Surely there can be no comparison between the two cases!

(3) A priest who breaks God's commands is also more guilty than others, because he sins in spite of greater opportunities. There are so many things that should help him and prevent him from yielding to temptation. There

is his daily meditation and the regular recitation of the Divine Office, with all the strength and graces that such duties invariably bring, when faithfully and devoutly performed. Then there is the adorable Sacrifice of the Mass, offered up day by day, filling and flooding the soul of the fervent celebrant with light and strength and love, which should enable him to triumph easily over all his spiritual enemies during the succeeding day. Then the preparation of his sermons and catechetical instructions helps to remind him of his own obligations, and of the great need of watchfulness and care "lest perhaps, when he has preached to others, he himself should become a castaway" (I Cor., ix. 27). Furthermore, his work in the confessional and at the bedside of the sick and the dying should be a stimulus and a warning, which should help in no little degree to keep him ever on the narrow way. Contrast his case with that of a poor man, working all day in factory or mill (perhaps with dissolute companions, given to loose talk), who retires to rest almost too tired to say his prayers, and with no one to encourage him or to set him a really good example.

The whole atmosphere breathed by the priest, his entire work and surroundings—the fellow-

priests with whom he associates, the crucifix, holy pictures, and other pious objects which adorn his rooms and his presbytery—all without exception help him in a greater or less measure to think of God and to keep His Commandments; whereas the ordinary layman, absorbed in purely secular work and immersed in the distractions, amusements and dissipations of the world, has none, or at all events but very few of these helps to recollection and devotion. Hence, one who offends in spite of many and helpful opportunities, will certainly be held more responsible than one who must preserve his innocence without their aid, and perhaps even surrounded by constant difficulties, distractions and bad example. Few of us priests realize how much more favorable our own environment is than that of others for the purpose of saving and sanctifying our souls. But, while it makes it easier for us to keep the Commandments, it likewise increases our guilt, if in spite of this greater ease we nevertheless succumb. We have less excuse. We cannot allege the difficulties of the ordinary layman, for they have no existence in our case.

(4) A fourth reason why sin, in a priest, is more terrible and serious than the same sin would be in other men, is the much greater

scandal given. Instead of helping others by his example a priest who sins becomes a stumbling-block and a stone of offense to hundreds or, it may be, to many thousands!

St. Paul reminds us that we have to set an example of what we teach. "Be thou an example to the faithful" (I Tim., iv. 12), and again, when addressing Titus: "In all things, show thyself an example of good works" (ii. 7). The great St. Peter, addressing the "ancients," speaks in the same sense: "Feed the flock of Christ . . . not lording it . . . but being made a pattern." This Apostolic instruction is really but an application of our Lord's own words: "Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father, who is in heaven."

The Council of Trent itself reminds us that "there is nothing which lends a more constant incentive to piety and divine worship than the life and example of those who have dedicated themselves to the divine ministry" (Sess. XXIV, ci).

There is an old saying: "The corruption of the best is the worst" (*Corruptio optimi pessima*). Bad example is detestable in any one, and of very few evils has Jesus Christ spoken with so much warmth and vigor as of this:

"Woe to the world because of scandals! He that shall scandalize one of these little ones that believe in Me, it were better for him that a millstone should be hanged about his neck, and that he should be drowned in the depth of the sea" (Matt., xviii. 6-7). Yet, what is the scandal given by an ordinary person compared with the scandal given by a priest? Others may offend God and break His Commandments and excite very little attention. But the slightest deviation from the strict path of duty is noticed, and commented upon, and discussed, if it be the transgression of one of "the Lord's anointed." So much is expected of a priest, and the faithful have so exalted an opinion of him, that any fault he commits scandalizes them far more than would the same fault in any one else. Just as the smallest stain (which would be quite invisible on the ordinary dry land) will be detected at once on the spotless snow, so any offense in one whom we are accustomed to see standing at the altar and clothed in white linen and sacred vestments will be marked and detected at once.

Thus, it must be evident to every reflecting mind that a sin in a priest, by reason of the greater scandal given, must be worse than the same sin in any one of the faithful.

So far we have referred to ordinary mortal sins. When, however, a priest becomes an habitual drunkard, or goes through the form of marriage with a girl, and gives up the practice of his holy state altogether, the case is of course immeasurably more serious, and the scandal given beyond all computation; and, what is more, the wretched man seldom if ever becomes reconciled to God. Speaking of such cases as these, it is commonly said:

> When a priest falls, he falls like Satan,
> Never to rise again.

Fortunately, these cases are rare, but by no means so rare as we should like to find them; for, when they do occur, they spread desolation all around. We have known Catholics who have given up the Faith altogether on account of such happenings. Owing to their experience in the case of *one* fallen priest, they have lost all confidence in and all respect for the clergy in general, and refuse to have anything more to do with them. A priest is the salt of the earth. "But if the salt become unsavory, wherewith will you season it?" (Mark, ix. 49.)

"Sin in a priest," says Archbishop Scotti, "is the cause of much loss to his divine Master, because the scandal which he gives is like that

of Lucifer, who drew after him 'the third part of the stars' (Apoc., viii. 12), and because, as Pope Innocent III declares, the sin of one priest causes a whole multitude to sin" ("Meditations," IV., p. 201).

(5) Grave sin in a priest is a more appalling event also because his hearty repentance is far more difficult to bring about. Strange to say, motives that easily move others to seek reconciliation in the tribunal of penance scarcely ever influence a fallen priest. When a poor ignorant man sins, there are a thousand motives that we may put before him to induce him to return to God, but what can we tell a priest concerning the gravity of sin, or the mercy of God, or anything else, which he does not know already quite as well as we do? The fallen priest had all these facts before him when he deliberately broke the command of God. But, if they proved incapable of checking him in his mad career then, how will they *now* move him to retrace his steps and to undo the past? His fall is so deep, his crime so monstrous and flagrant, that something more than the ordinary graces of God seem needed to bring him to a sense of his misery and to arouse him to full consciousness of his deplorable state. Whatever the explanation may be, it is generally agreed that a

fallen priest is much more difficult to reclaim and reëstablish in grace than any ordinary sinner, however deeply he may have transgressed.

St. Chrysostom observes: "Delinquent laymen are easily amended, but clerics who fall into vice are beyond amendment." But what St. Paul writes (Heb., vi. 4-6), is still more terrifying and awful: "It is impossible for those who were once illuminated, have tasted also the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and who have moreover tasted the good word of God and the powers of the world to come, and are fallen away, to be renewed again to penance, crucifying again to themselves the Son of God, and making Him a mockery." This helps us to appreciate the words of St. Jerome: "Great is the dignity of priests, but great also is their downfall if they sin" (*Grandis dignitas sacerdotum, sed grandis ruina, si peccent*).

These, then, are five reasons which make sin in a minister of the Gospel far more serious and far more lamentable than sin in any ordinary member of his flock. Let us, then, bear them in mind, and use them as so many additional reasons for taking every precaution which may keep us from breaking the law of God.

CHAPTER X

THE SPIRITUAL INSECURITY EVEN OF A PRIEST

"I chastize my body, and bring it into subjection, lest perhaps, when I have preached to others, I myself should become a castaway" (I Cor., ix. 27).

AT first sight it seems wellnigh impossible that a priest should be lost. When we consider the number and the splendor of the graces that have been heaped upon him, the dignity of his office, the closeness of his union with the supreme Source of all holiness, the sublimity of his functions, his daily Mass and the rest, we are inclined to argue that, whatever may be the case in regard to others, he at all events can have little to fear. If any one is safe, surely a priest must be! This might well be our *a priori* judgment, but unfortunately the experience of wellnigh twenty centuries proves without the shadow of a doubt that such a judgment is absolutely false. In every age of the Church's history, we have witnessed the unhappy and permanent

ruin of some who have been consecrated to the service of God and chosen by Him to share in His divine priesthood. How often the solemn warning of St. Augustine has sounded in our ears: "I speak from experience, and believe one experienced. I have seen the cedars of Lebanon topple to the ground, of whose sanctity I would no more have doubted than of the virtue of Jerome!" And the experience of this great Doctor of the Church is, alas, the experience of every careful observer. The fact is, we are *all* placed in this world on trial. Priests, no less than other men, are in this world in order to be tested and proved by various temptations. And we priests shall be tested perhaps even more than others, for St. Luke (xii. 48) tells us: "Unto whomsoever much is given, of him much shall be required; and to whom they have committed much, of him they will demand the more."

If a priest is in danger of committing sin, then he is also in danger of damnation. Between mortal sin and hell-fire there is the closest possible connection. What is more intimately united than a cause and its effect? Nothing. Yet this is the relation between sin and hell. If I have ever committed mortal sin in the past, I may do so again in the future. And, if I com-

mit sin in the future, I may die in sin; if I die in sin, eternal damnation is not only possible, but absolutely certain. Now observe that, though I may know the various temptations which have assailed me in the past, I have no idea as to the nature or the violence of the temptations which, in God's providence, are destined to try me and to test my loyalty in the future. They may be much more serious and immeasurably more difficult to resist than any I have had hitherto. If I have yielded to even lesser assaults, is there no danger that I shall yield also to these? Most certainly there is danger, and my great security is, not to close my eyes to this danger, but to realize it as clearly as possible. "He that thinketh himself to stand, let him take heed lest he fall" (I Cor., x. 12).

Let us reflect that there is really nothing to justify any feeling of great security. In the first place, we do not know with absolute certainty that we are even at this present moment in a state of grace. "There are just men and wise men, and their works are in the hands of God," says the Holy Spirit, "and yet man knoweth not whether he be worthy of love or of hatred" (Eccles., ix. 1). This uncertainty should keep us very humble, and should impress upon us the need, pointed out by the Apostle,

to "work out our salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil., ii. 12).

In the second place, let us remember that our Blessed Lord was addressing His own chosen Apostles when He said: "Fear ye not them that kill the body, and are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear Him that can destroy both soul and body into hell" (Matt., x. 28). In these words He was speaking to those favored ones whom He had especially chosen, and who were living with Him and witnessing His spotless life, listening to His heavenly doctrine and marveling at His miracles. And, even in their case, was His warning not called for? If the Apostles had listened more attentively to His warning, and had taken His words more to heart, perhaps Peter would not have denied Him so soon after, and Judas would surely not have betrayed Him, and then hanged himself in despair.

The case of Judas should, above all, teach us a lesson, for he was far more favored than any of us, and yet he was damned. He had a clear call to the priesthood, a real vocation; for he was called by Jesus Christ Himself. He spent his days in the company of Jesus. He had the most perfect example of the Incarnate Son of God constantly before him. He listened day after day to the words that fell from His

mouth. He watched Him as He stilled the tempest, and cured the blind and the deaf, and saw Him call even the dead to life, and work other prodigies. If a man could fall, and fall so low and so hopelessly amid such wholly special and helpful surroundings, surely an ordinary priest, whose environment is not nearly so advantageous, should feel some distrust of himself, and should see the need of care and watchfulness, lest he, with fewer exceptional safeguards, should also fall miserably and irrevocably into sin.

In the third place, we have the example of a vast number of both men and women (many, it would seem, more favorably circumstanced than we are), who have made shipwreck of the Faith or have fallen miserably, from the time of David, and Solomon and Samson to the time of Luther and Döllinger, and other still more modern apostates.

In the fourth place, we should learn humility and distrust of ourselves from the example of the saints. While ordinary priests are often found to be quite insensible of any danger, and act and talk as if there were no reason to fear or to be especially on their guard, we find the highest of the saints full of the deepest apprehension and ever taking precautions lest they

be seduced by the wiles of the devil. Their profound humility kept them ever in that fear which is "the beginning of wisdom." They not only knew, as we must all know, that "of ourselves we can do nothing," but they feared exceedingly lest by their want of fidelity they might forfeit the special protection of heaven, without which it would be quite impossible to persevere.

Let us take a few examples. Look at St. Paul. His whole life from the time of his conversion was spent in the exercise of heroic virtue. Who labored as he did? Who bore such terrible and such continual sufferings? Who was more favored by God? Think of his journeys, his sufferings, his burning zeal, his ardent charity; think of his being raised to the third heaven and the many other wonders of his apostolic life. Yet, amid it all, he stood in continual fear of falling into sin. Not content with the innumerable trials and hardships which strewed his path, he even went so far as to add to them yet other mortifications and penances, so as to render his salvation more secure. Listen, and marvel: "I chastize my body and bring it into subjection." Why does he adopt such severe measures? Is he not safe? Does any danger threaten him? We, in our pride, may think we are very secure, but that was not the

way with the saints. Even the heroic Apostle of the Gentiles would never allow that he was secure, so as a safeguard he chastized his poor, worn-out body. Why? He leaves us under no doubt as to the reason: "Lest perhaps, when I have preached to others, I myself should become a castaway" (I Cor., ix. 27). If St. Paul fears, surely we have much more reason to fear and to be ever on our guard. If he trembles for his salvation, are we wise in being without solicitude? Oh, in the name of God, who has mercifully called us to the priesthood, if we have not the sanctity of St. Paul, let us at all events try and share his profound humility!

But this holy fear was a characteristic of all the saints. Even the great St. Augustine writes: "I have searched the Holy Scriptures through and through, but I have never been able to discover a text which would justify my ceasing to fear." In the Life of St. Francis Borgia we are told that, on one occasion, being unusually serious and downcast, his companions asked him what was the matter, and why he was so sad and so depressed. He answered: "I have been meditating on the awful punishments reserved for those who die in sin, and asking myself if I may, in spite of all my infidelities, escape them."

Or transport yourself in spirit into the bleak African desert, and gaze at the renowned St. Jerome kneeling there on the stony ground, absorbed in prayer, and holding a jagged stone in his hand, with which he continues to strike his naked breast. Why is he there? What has induced him to become the companion of wild beasts and serpents, and to lead this life of heroic penance and mortification? He himself tells us: "Ob gehennæ metum. . . ." (Through the fear of hell, I have fled away from the abodes of men, and am become the companion of wild beasts.) Whenever he heard the boisterous wind sweeping through the desert, he tells us he thought of the blast of the angel's trumpet summoning him to judgment on the last day, and he trembled in every limb in anticipation of the rigorous account he would have to give of himself on that day: "Quando cœli movendi sunt et terra, et cum vix justus sit securus."

We have another instance in the case of St. Peter Damian, whose great sanctity seemed in no way to lessen his salutary fear. It is recorded that, so far from setting aside the thought of damnation as an altogether impossible fate for himself, "the very hairs of his head stood up with fear," whenever the subject was broached.

Even to the very end of his saintly life, St. Bernard used to express his fear, and could be heard (writes his biographer) exclaiming: "O Hell, the bare remembrance of thee fills my whole soul with terror." St. Francis, and indeed other founders of religious Orders, used often to exhort their disciples to tremble at the thought of God's dreadful punishment, and not to flatter themselves for a moment that such meditations were not for them. They would often say to their followers: "Go down to hell often in spirit and in imagination during life, and familiarize yourselves with its raging fires and quenchless flames while you are still on earth, so that you may never be in any danger of being sent there when this life is over." And such was the sound advice of many a saint. All Christians are exhorted to work out their salvation with "fear and trembling," for in sober truth no man is really safe. And least of all, perhaps, we priests.

And why do I say that? Well, for the following reasons:

(1) Because of the almost angelic purity and innocence our functions demand;

(2) Because of the close union demanded in us between virtues which seem most difficult to combine, such as burning zeal, on the one hand,

and consummate prudence, on the other; the exercise of exceptional power and authority, yet deep humility and a true appreciation of our own nothingness, and so on;

(3) Because of the difficult and delicate situations in which our position sometimes places us, such as in the confessional and at the bedside of the sick, or when called upon to settle disputes,[1] to counsel and advise, or to decide vocations, and so forth. To give just one illustration of the harm an imprudent and impetuous pastor may do, and of his great responsibility, I may mention that I have actually known cases in which both men and women have been driven out of the Church by the strong political harangues (I cannot call them sermons) in which certain hot-headed preachers have indulged even in the church of God.

There are few things concerning which certain lay people feel more strongly, or about which they are more sensitive than politics. Such people resent and simply cannot tolerate a priest taking advantage of his position to air his own particular political views, and (however

[1] "In assuming to be judges between the rich and the poor—between the ruler and the subject—between the landlord and the tenant—we run a risk of being unjust; for we sometimes act on one-sided knowledge" ("Allocutions," by the the late Bishop Moriarty of Kerry, p. 286).

foolishly) they will rather dispense altogether with his services, and refuse to go to Mass or the Sacraments, than continue to frequent his church, which is perhaps the only one in the neighborhood. There is no use trying to meet this difficulty by pointing out that such people are foolish, that they should allow nothing to interfere with their duty to God, and that, even though a priest should do wrong, they are only punishing themselves by committing sin. No; we have to take people as they are, and do nothing that can lead them into sin. Even were such political harangues not blameworthy nor forbidden, which they most certainly are, we should carefully avoid them because of the scandal. Even the most innocent actions are to be abstained from, if we know that they will be the occasion of sin.

"If," says St. Paul, "meat scandalize my brother, I will never eat meat, lest I should scandalize my brother" (I Cor., viii. 13). And why is this? The Apostle states the reason when he urges us "not to give offense to any man, that our ministry be not blamed" (II Cor., vi. 3). Surely, where the salvation of souls and the interests of Jesus Christ are concerned, we can forego the personal satisfaction of announcing our own political judgments and convictions

from the pulpit! If not, we shall be running the great risk of losing our soul. "Hear ye this, O priests, and hark, for there is a judgment against you, because you have been a snare to them whom you should have watched over" (Osee, v. 1). We are expected to be, not a "snare," but a help.

(4) Another reason why we priests are in greater danger even than others, is because, although the devil tempts every one, yet he tempts us with much greater violence and cunning. Our Lord, addressing St. Peter, said: "Simon, Simon, behold Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat" (Luke, xxii. 31). And, as Satan desired to have the Apostles, so does he desire to have those who are now doing the work of the Apostles, and whose special office is to resist and to counteract his influence. In the priest Satan recognizes one specially set aside and armed with supernatural arms, and placed in this world for the express purpose of fighting against him and thwarting him at every turn. In the priest he beholds one who is constantly robbing him of his prey, warning others of his enmity, rescuing souls from the chains in which he has bound them, and undoing and spoiling his nefarious work in a thousand different ways. To bring about the fall of any

soul redeemed by God is his delight, but his greatest ambition is to encompass the fall of one consecrated to the service of the altar. In the first place, because it is a far greater insult to God; secondly, because of the priest's high dignity (*corruptio optimi pessima*); thirdly, because of the awful scandal that ensues; and lastly because it destroys the priest's power for good, and may easily lead on to sacrilege, and (as in the case of Judas) even to a final impenitence.

In the warfare of this world, how careful a man becomes so soon as ever he knows that he is being followed and watched by some sworn enemy, who has resolved at any cost to take his life! How cautiously he threads his way, how attentively he watches every passer-by, how suspicious he is of lurking danger, how prudent and circumspect in all his actions! Yet how careless and how foolhardy we are, although we have a much more subtle and tireless enemy, ever on our track and resolved to destroy, if he possibly can, not the life of the body, but the infinitely more precious life of the soul! Well may our Lord say that "the children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light" (Luke, xvi. 8). If we took half as much trouble to preserve our spiritual life as the children of this world do to safeguard

their temporal life, there would be nothing to fear. Consider how solicitous people of the world are about their bodily health, and how they are ever on the watch lest it should become impaired. They will take alarm at the slightest unfavorable symptoms, and will not rest satisfied unless they are feeling "quite fit."

It should be the same with us in relation to our spiritual health, which we must acknowledge to be of infinitely greater importance. Our daily examination of conscience, our morning's meditation, and yet more our weekly confession, should be enough to keep us well informed as to whether we are keeping our fervor up to concert pitch, or whether we are gradually relaxing our efforts and sinking into an easy, unworthy, and self-indulgent manner of life. Some more devoted priests have the excellent custom of making just one day's recollection or retreat on the first or the last day of every month just to keep their fervor up to the proper level, and to arouse themselves to fresh zeal in the service of God. They endeavor to remain as silent and as retired as possible for this one day in the month, during which they occupy themselves in prayer, spiritual reading, meditation, examination of conscience, and other spiritual exercises, in order to rekindle the dwindling fires of

their devotion, and in order not only to check any tendency to lukewarmness before it becomes too difficult, but to raise themselves up to a still higher degree of virtue. For no one can stand still on the path to heaven. All spiritual writers agree that "not to advance is to recede" —not to go forward is to go back.

Then, most important of all, there is the annual retreat of eight or ten days in which our whole life, with all its duties and obligations, is most carefully and leisurely examined, and wherein an excellent opportunity is given of setting right any evil habit or serious neglect and of starting a life of perfection in the future. The annual retreat is of the utmost consequence, and should never be omitted.

CHAPTER XI

GATES OF HELL.—I. AVARICE

"There is not a more wicked thing than to love money, for such a one setteth even his own soul to sale" (Ecclus., x. 10).

EVERY man that comes into this world, and lives long enough to be able to discriminate between good and evil, virtue and vice, is called upon to decide for himself his eternal future. It is a gigantic responsibility indeed, but there is no possible escape from it. Of all grave questions that can occupy the human mind, there is none so momentous, so solemn, or so far-reaching in its consequences as the question of a hereafter. Am I mortal or immortal? For me, that is the question of questions. Am I like the flower that blooms for a brief season, and then falls and fades forever? Or am I like an impregnable rock, set in the midst of an ebbing sea, standing itself unmoved, while all else is drifting and passing by? Does death, that destroys my flesh, destroy me? Does disease's sharp dart,

that kills the body, pierce also the soul? I look into the endless future, I ponder on the eternal years. And, as I am borne along on the wings of thought into measureless periods too distant to be realized, too vast to be reckoned, I ask myself: Shall I still be living then? Thinking? Reasoning? Conscious still? Shall I remain with all my faculties unimpaired, when the earth and all that earth contains has been swept away? Shall I live on, as full of life as ever, through fall of stars and crash of worlds, and through the general destruction that awaits all material things? Or is death an extinguisher, which, when it comes, puts out the brief flame of consciousness forever?

Fortunately, there is no room for doubt. That man is made to survive the dissolution of the body, is not only the most certain teaching of divine revelation, but it is so bound up and interwoven with thought and action, motive and conduct, that we find it impossible to remove the doctrine, *even in thought,* without seeing the whole social fabric totter and fall to pieces like a house of cards. That there is an eternity for me, is a fact, not a fancy. Or rather, there are two entirely distinct eternities: there is the eternity of supreme, secure and perfect happiness, and there is, on the other hand, the eternity of

supreme, certain and absolute misery. And—oh, awful and awe-inspiring thought!—it rests with me to decide which of the two is to be mine.

I am a priest. Yes; but that rather increases than diminishes my responsibility. I am still the arbiter of my own fate, the architect of my fortune, and the only accountable cause of the sentence that must very soon be passed upon me. The position is enunciated with the most overwhelming clearness by no less an authority than the infinitely just Judge Himself. "Before man is life and death, good and evil; that which he shall choose shall be given to him" (Ecclus., xv. 18).

My eternal lot must be decided by myself. The free choice has been placed within my own hands. Heaven and hell are before me. Eternal life and eternal death are quivering in the balance, and (to apply the inspired words to myself) *that which I shall choose shall be given to me.* Now, just as Almighty God has prepared two different eternities, so He has designed two different roads along which souls travel toward these eternities. He calls that which leads to heaven the *narrow* road, and He calls that which leads to hell the *broad* road. But, having explained very clearly where each road leads, He leaves us absolutely free to

choose whichever we like, though, at the same time, we are warned that while "many walk along the broad road, but few follow the narrow road" (Matt., vii. 13-14).

This statement is as terrible as it is true, and may well set us furiously thinking. I may be a priest, but I am a man, with all the weaknesses and passions and human frailties of a man. As others are placed here in this world for the express purpose of being tested and tried, so am I. The life of a priest is no more exempt from danger and struggle and temptation than that of other men. The warnings we read in the Inspired Writ apply to priests as they apply to others. "Man's life upon earth is a warfare" (Job, vii. 1). And in war not only wounds but even death may be our lot, if we are not careful. So again, we are told that, "as silver is tried by fire, and gold in the furnace, so the Lord trieth the hearts" (Prov., xvii. 3). The selfsame fires here spoken of, that are designed by the providence of God to try others, are also designed to try me.

Life is *intended* to be a time of trial and temptation. I can no more escape temptation than I can escape the heats of summer or the frosts of winter. But, whether I am worsted in the struggle or not, whether I conquer or am

conquered, depends entirely upon myself. That is the most consoling and encouraging difference between the material and the spiritual warfare. In our contests with the devil, the world and the flesh, we are absolutely certain of victory, if only we are resolute. In the spiritual contests, to be brave is to be victorious; *to be courageous is the same thing as to be both invincible and invulnerable.* Until we have freely yielded our full consent, the enemy cannot harm us. To force us is wholly impossible and beyond his power, for we have the explicit promise of God Himself that He will "never allow us to be tried beyond our strength, but that He will so make issue with temptation, that we may be able to bear it" (I Cor., x. 13). In short, under every circumstance, we are always masters of the situation. The whole power of hell combined may lay siege to the citadels of our hearts, but not a single fiend can pass the threshold, until we choose to fling open the doors and shamefully let him through.

Indeed, it is precisely because we act freely whenever we sin, that sin is such a terrible offense against God; just as it is because we are perfectly free agents that a good choice is so pleasing to God. Hence the inspired words: "He that could have transgressed, and hath not

transgressed; and could do evil things, and hath not done them: he shall have glory everlasting" (Ecclus., xxxi. 10).

Considering the immense multitude of priests, it is satisfactory to be able to say that the fall of a cleric is a rare and exceptional thing. But, at the same time, we cannot disguise from ourselves the lamentable fact that sometimes even priests fall, and that in every age the Church must lament the loss of a certain number.

And, while we weep over such as have fallen, we shall be wise to take a warning from them, and to be doubly watchful lest we too shall succumb to the same danger, and share their too awful fate.

History teaches that, on those rare occasions when a priest does prove disloyal to God and sinks deeply into the filthy mire of sin, it is generally through the force of one of three attractions, and these we should carefully consider so as to be put upon our guard. It is true that hell has a thousand gates, but it is also true that when a priest, whether secular or regular, enters hell, he almost invariably passes through one of three. That is to say, he enters through the gate marked AVARICE, or else through the gate marked IMPURITY, or lastly through the still wider gate marked INTEMPERANCE. Conse-

quently, these three vices should be especially watched and dreaded. In this chapter, we shall now touch very briefly upon avarice.

We may begin by observing that, of all the many millions of priests that have lived since the Church was first founded, the very first who left this world left it to be cast headlong into the quenchless flames of hell. And it was precisely his love of money that brought about his eternal damnation. We refer, of course, to Judas Iscariot. When Mary Magdalene poured the precious ointment over our Lord's feet, he already betrayed symptoms of a niggardly spirit. It was Judas who at once objected to such waste, urging that "it might have been sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor" (John, xii. 5). But St. John informs us, in inspired words, that Judas spoke thus, "not because he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and carried the purse" (xii. 6). Instead of recognizing his evil passion and endeavoring to correct and subdue it, he allowed it to develop and to gain greater strength, until at last it led him to the commission of the most inconceivably horrible crime that has ever been recorded in history; for in the end he did not hesitate to sell his divine Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, for a few miserable pieces of silver. While this atro-

cious crime fills us with dismay, it likewise illustrates the danger of admitting even the first promptings of avarice to strike root in our hearts. For this is one of the three gates of hell through which fallen priests enter into their eternal place of torment.

Like Judas, a priest has to hold the purse. That is to say, he is obliged to have the means of carrying on the services of the Church; his very duty compels him to collect sufficient funds to provide all that is necessary for the work of the parish, besides which both himself and his curates have to be housed, clothed and fed. Consequently, *nolens volens,* he is obliged to be in some degree solicitous about securing the necessaries of life.

No one will complain of that. It is just as it should be. But it is *precisely this necessary contact with "filthy lucre"* that is apt, unless we are on our guard, to lead little by little to the sin of avarice. We have to collect money, watch over it, use it with discretion and prudence, and make it go as far as possible. We see its value and all that it will do, and we long for more, in order that we may thereby advance the interests of religion, and make our church more beautiful, and our services more attractive, and so on. But, unless we resolutely withstand the

inclination, we shall find that by degrees we shall come to value money for its own sake. We hoard it. We do not like to part with it. We cannot bear the thought of diminishing our hard-earned store. The next downward step is that we become over-exacting. We do more readily that which will bring us some addition to our banking account than anything else, and we value *this* position rather than *that,* and wish to be sent to this parish rather than to the other, according to the emoluments that it provides.

Once the first feeble seeds of this degrading passion are allowed to take root, it is astonishing how soon and how vigorously they grow, and how soon they choke the more generous impulses of our nature. Yet hardly anything is so strikingly contrary to the whole spirit of a disciple of Christ as this love of the almighty dollar.

Christ is our model. What was there that He so despised and thrust from Him as money and possessions? Who ever showed a greater love of poverty and want? Yet He is the Eternal Wisdom of the Father, and so cannot be deceived in His estimate of things. "Being rich, He became poor for your sake so that you might be enriched through His poverty," as St. Ambrose observes. Hence, while the Apostle St.

Paul bids us feed the flock of Christ, he is careful to add, not for the hope of pecuniary remuneration (*non turpis lucri gratia*). For it rests with the chosen priests of God, even beyond all others, to show to the world around them that "nothing is more wicked than the covetous man. There is not a more wicked thing than to love money, for such a one setteth even his own soul to sale" (Ecclus., x. 9-10). How indeed can we denounce with freedom the avarice of others, if we ourselves are known to be infected by the same horrid vice? St. Jerome urges us to avoid, as the plague, those among the clergy who become rich (*Clericum ex inopi divitem, ex ignobili nobilem, tamquam pestem fuge*). "Let us examine our hearts carefully on this point," writes Archbishop Kirby, "and diligently extirpate from them every latent germ of attachment to the things of the world, which has been the cause of spiritual ruin to multitudes of incautious ecclesiastics from the time of Judas to the present." Weigh well the inspired warning of St. Paul to Timothy (vi. 9 sqq.): "They that will become rich fall into temptation, and into the snare of the devil, and into many unprofitable and hurtful desires, which drown men into destruction and perdition; for the desire of money is the root of all evils, which some covet-

ing have erred from the Faith, and have entangled themselves in many sorrows. But, thou, O man of God, fly these things, and pursue justice, godliness, faith, charity, patience, mildness. Fight the good fight of faith; lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art called."

Let us be sure to keep the gate of hell marked AVARICE securely closed and doubly barred by our constant efforts to destroy utterly the very first symptoms of this damnable vice, "casting all our care upon Him, for He hath care of us" (I Peter, v. 7).

The Apostle calls this vice "a snare of the devil" to give us to understand that we may be caught unawares. This we constantly see in life. Even when caught, the avaricious man will never admit that he is avaricious. In confession or out of confession, he has no scruple about it. "How many priests there are," observes a Council of Milan, "otherwise good, modest, of upright life, given to study, exemplary, whom this cursed penuriousness and avarice render objects of hatred before God and man!" The anonymous author of "Enchiridion Clericorum" (pp. 151-152) describes several cases of clerical avarice which came under his own notice, of which we shall transcribe only the following.

"Father X," he writes, "was a man who, by bland and courteous manners, insinuated himself into the good graces of several families, so that he used to take them in a circuit, and dine with one or another of them every day. His living, by this means, cost him little, and being in all other regards most tenacious, his money in the course of years accumulated to several thousand pounds. Old age came on him, and seeing that in the end he should not be able to go to the bank, he sold out his stock, and locked up the proceeds in a strong box in his bedroom. No person knew anything about his hidden treasure, for it is a characteristic of the avaricious man to keep his secret as closely as he keeps his money. However, his last illness came at length; and what about the strong box and its contents? The fear of his keys came into his mind, and the poor miserable man crept out of bed, put on his small clothes, and, transferring his treasure from the box to his pockets, got back again into bed. There he lay with the *sacra fames auri* preying upon his vitals, with his thousands upon his person, and would have so died, were it not that a venerable priest, coming to see him, on the very day he died, and, finding out by some means the state of the case, induced him to make his will. A few hours saw him in eternity.

Surely few of us, indeed, would exclaim: 'May my last end be like to his!' "

I will now illustrate the same danger from my own experience. I well remember a zealous secular priest, who, for some years, did very good work on the mission. After a while, however, he began to aspire for something higher and more perfect, and so he joined the Society of Jesus. All might then have gone well, but for the fact that some rich American relative died, and left him a large sum of money. He was fully aware that, if he remained a Jesuit, he would not be allowed to have complete control of his newly acquired fortune, and would have to hand it over to the Society. But the thought of all this gold, and of the influence and the independence it would secure for him, proved too great an attraction for him to resist. What was the result? He left the Society of Jesus. He set up on his own account. Then he made himself very comfortable, got into easy and luxurious ways, took to drink and dissipation, and in an incredibly short time died a miserable death without any aid from priest or sacraments. As in other cases, so in this the love of money (so far as we can see) cost this unhappy priest his immortal soul. Had it not been for the wealth left him, he would, so far

as we can tell, have lived and died a holy religious, and now be reioicing with the glorious saints and angels.

Let us learn the important lesson that these terrible falls teach us, and watch as well as pray lest the crafty fiend, who has led so many others astray should succeed in deceiving us also, and should make us a sport for our enemies.

As a last warning, I would observe that this vice of avarice, unlike many others, is especially to be feared by the old, for it is apt to increase rather than to diminish as death approaches. The words of St. Gregory have been realized again and again, since he uttered them in the bitterness of his great soul: "All vices wane as man ages except avarice alone, which never ages" (*Moral.*, lib. xv, cap. 11).

CHAPTER XII

GATES OF HELL.—II. IMPURITY

"All uncleanness, let it not so much as be named among you, as becometh saints" (Eph., v. 3).

ALTHOUGH priests, like other men, may fall and make shipwreck of the Faith, yet such falls are, thank God, few and far between. In proof of this, we are glad to be able to quote such a very wise and experienced bishop as the late W. B. Ullathorne, O.S.B. Speaking of the clergy, in a letter to Lady Chatterton, he writes: "Falls are not only few, but rare, as they are in the New Testament. Protestants can have but little notion of the way in which a priest is guarded in his state of life. The long and pious training; the daily recital of the Divine Office, mostly taken from the Holy Scripture, and the greater part consisting of the Psalms; the fixed hour of meditation; the use of the confessional; the strict canonical discipline that surrounds a priest's life; all these are perpetual helps, sup-

ports, and guards against human weakness. Further, a vocation to the priesthood implies an extraordinary gift of grace from the Holy Spirit, and that grace, unless much abused, is stronger than nature" (cfr. E. H. Dering, "Georgiana Lady Chatterton," p. 229).

Though they are rare, yet most appalling falls do sometimes happen, and it is our duty to guard against them, and to learn caution from the sad experience of our unfortunate brethren. The special danger against which we propose sounding the trumpet of warning now, is incontinency.

A priest is bound by vow to strict continency. As soon as he receives the subdiaconate, he puts himself under the strictest obligation to lead a virginal life and to forego all ideas of marriage. The Church honors and blesses the state of marriage for such as are called to it. In her eyes, it is not only a solemn contract, but a great Sacrament, instituted by Christ, and conferring wonderful graces. In this way, she honors it far more than any of the many non-Catholic churches. But, while she honors marriage, yet she honors still more the state of celibacy embraced for highly religious motives. Like St. Paul, she teaches that "he who giveth his daughter in marriage doth well; but that he who

giveth her not doth *better*" (I Cor., vii. 38). And, if any body of men more than another should choose the *better* and the higher way, it should surely be those who feel themselves called by the Holy Spirit to the sublime work of the ministry.

The Church obliges no one to enter into the ecclesiastical state. All she says is: "The mission entrusted to me by Christ is so holy and of such transcendent importance that I must have picked men as my ministers and coadjutors. I must employ only such as are generous enough and zealous enough to devote, *not only a part, but the whole* of their energies to the incomparable work of saving souls. I will accept no one with a divided heart. If you wish to marry, I make no objection; I do not interfere with your choice. All I say is, you may be most excellent men and good Catholics, but you will not do for the work of the ministry; you do not come up to my standard; you cannot enter into my priesthood. I require laborers of a finer caliber, of a higher type—men of self-sacrifice and capable of denying themselves to the extent of living virginal lives."

Weigh well the inspired words of St. Paul, which have an altogether special application to priests, who are called upon to labor in the vine-

yard of the Church, and are expected to give themselves up heart and soul to their sublime calling. "I would have you to be without solicitude," he writes, and therefore unmarried, for "he that is without a wife, is solicitous for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please God. But he that is with a wife, is solicitous for the things of the world, how he may please his wife; and *he is 'divided'*" (I Cor., vii. 32-33). Do we want ministers of the Gospel whose hearts are *'divided,* and whose position renders it impossible for them to devote their undivided attention to the intensely important work entrusted to them? Most emphatically, no!

Hence, the Church in her wisdom has decreed that no one shall be ordained a priest according to the Latin Rite, unless he takes a solemn vow of perpetual chastity.

Now, this is in many cases an act of heroism, as it cuts off from the priest what, in the eyes of the world at all events, are some of the highest and most intense pleasures of life. Much care and watchfulness, together with great prudence and a strong resolution, are needed in order to keep ever faithful and loyal to one's promise. Hence, it is not surprising that priests who fall, sometimes fall by yielding to the strong prompt-

ings of a nature not altogether conquered and subdued.

What some young priests seem sometimes to forget is, that they are human, and therefore that they have the very same strong passions and inclinations as other men. The clerical garb, the cassock, is not an extinguisher. It does not put out the natural fires that are found latent in every human heart, and that are apt to blaze up and provoke a conflagration, if carelessly exposed to every wind that blows. We must open our eyes to facts. We must realize how things are.

Man is so constituted that woman attracts him. He is so formed by the Creator that he attracts and is attracted by the gentler sex. Young men of the world are constantly feeling this attraction, and being won over by it. There is undoubtedly a strange and strong fascination. It is often difficult to account for it. Two persons of opposite sex meet, perhaps for the first time, in a public ball-room, and feel at once irresistibly drawn towards each other. Or some pure chance throws them together, and immediately they fall desperately in love. They feel that they are made for each other; that they cannot live apart; that they have but one life between them, and that, if separated, they must

die. They have loved before, but this is a new experience. They have loved their father and mother, their brothers and sisters, but this is quite another sort of love. It is not only immeasurably stronger, but far more concentrated and absorbing, so that it seems to dull, if not to destroy, all other. Those who have had the experience tell us that there is nothing in life so joyous, so delightful, and so intoxicatingly sweet as this. They all agree with the poet, when he says: "There is nothing half so sweet in life as Love's young dream."

Now, a priest should be fully aware of all this, and *all the more so,* because it is not for him. He has no business to go about and to act as though he had received some magic dress that will render him invulnerable, and that will at once turn back all Cupid's arrows. On the contrary, he should bear well in mind, from the first, that he is but human, and just as likely to be influenced as other men are influenced, if he is foolish enough and wicked enough to willfully expose himself to the temptation. He can no more change his nature than the leopard can change his skin. He may be ever so pious and ever so devout, but, so long as he is a man, he will remain sensitive and impressionable to external influences. Once he has deliberately and

voluntarily made the sacrifice, and vowed himself to a celibate life, he is bound not only to watch and to pray, but also to avoid carefully all dangerous occasions, for if in other cases to "love the danger, is to perish in it," as our Lord reminds us, it is *especially true in this case*. A thick rod of iron may be strong and rigid and unbending, so that it might seem that nothing could ever twist it out of shape; but just plunge it into the midst of fire, and it at once loses its hardness, and becomes as malleable as the softest wax. So, even the most virtuous and steadfast lose their courage, and yield to the attraction, so soon as they *willfully thrust themselves into the furnace of temptation*. The Holy Scriptures are full of the most appalling illustrations, which should make a careless and incautious priest shudder and tremble for his own safety; for he is but a frail man, and "neither holier than David, nor stronger than Samson, nor wiser than Solomon" (as St. Augustine remarks), and yet all these fell.

There is little real danger so long as one is careful to check the first breath of temptation. Even in the case of the most serious falls, it is always true that warnings have been neglected, symptoms have been disregarded, and the first feeble attractions have been encouraged, rather

than resisted, and then the unfortunate victim has been plunged, head over heels, in the mire of sin.

First the attraction is felt. Then just a little intimacy is allowed, but of course "nothing wrong" is intended. In fact, the danger is approached, as a swimmer might approach a rapid whirlpool. He too has no intention whatsoever of being engulfed. He merely wishes to see how near he can get. Then, when he least expects it, he is caught in the rapidly eddying waters, and drawn right down the open throat of the whirlpool, and is lost forever!

It is said that this passion has a way of developing with startling suddenness and rapidity, and that even a slight indulgence or a momentary imprudence may sometimes arouse desires almost impossible to resist. There is no safety but in courageously resisting the first stirrings of this evil inclination.

During my forty and more years of priesthood, I have had the sad experience of seeing, I will not say many, but some forsake their high office, and go through the form of marriage; and in each case the fall has come about in the simplest and, I suppose I must say, the most natural way possible. I will give but one instance.

There was Father "Z" working alone on a

nice little mission, just outside London. He was a learned and scholarly man, and for a time looked well after his flock. Now, among his parishioners was a lively, energetic and attractive young lady, who loved to busy herself about the church and the sanctuary. Her great delight was to bring flowers and to decorate the altar. Saturday after Saturday she would be found filling the vases with flowers and arranging them on the altar, and making everything look as bright and as beautiful as possible. Father "Z" would naturally commend her for her pains. At length, one Saturday afternoon, observing her to be somewhat wearied by her hard work, he asked her to come into the presbytery and refresh herself with a cup of tea with him. To this she willingly assented, pouring out the tea herself and doing the honors of the tea-table.

This little *tête-à-tête* tea-drinking was often repeated. It soon became a regular thing. Father "Z," no doubt, found it pleasant, and probably became more and more familiar and more and more off his guard, and at last, it is supposed, threw discretion to the winds, and forgot his solemn vow and his duty to God, and everything else that mattered; for a few months later he disappeared. Soon after, it was noised

abroad and announced in all the papers that Father "Z" had gone off with a girl, and had been married at such a church in such a district and so forth, to the great scandal, distress and amazement of all the Catholics of the neighborhood.

From the above instance, it is clearly seen that Father "Z" was preparing for a fall by reason of his extreme imprudence. Just as soon as he began to feel the attraction, he should have taken alarm, and have first of all realized and then have guarded against the danger. As Rev. E. R. Hull, S.J., reminds us, even grace and the Sacraments cannot be counted on as transforming forces. They cannot be expected to obliterate the attractiveness of the object, nor yet to atrophy our susceptibility to its charms. The efficacy of grace itself depends entirely upon the *coöperation of our own will.*

Before concluding this chapter, let us consider most carefully the following guiding points, taken from Father Hull's interesting treatise:

"(1) The attractiveness of the object excites naturally a response in the subject. If we wish to avoid this response, we must manage to cut off the object, either by not seeing it, or by diverting the attention from it when seen.

"(2) When the response has been elicited, it

naturally issues in desire. This desire in turn tends spontaneously to the pursuit of the object, so that, by merely being allowed to proceed, it will accomplish the act by itself—hence the necessity of throwing a barrier across the movement by a determination of the free will; or, better still, to cut off the source of the movement by turning away the attention to some other object, thus causing it to die away.

"(3) Any desire, when once conceived, tends to increase in strength, with a consequent increase in the vehemence of the movement. Hence the importance of putting the check on it at the beginning, while the current is small and weak, instead of waiting till it has become large and strong. . . . If a man hesitates, if he dallies with an evil thought, he will require a much stronger effort, and even then the temptation will cling to him for a considerable time. But, should he allow the passion to grow till it takes possession of his frame, little short of a surgical operation will rid him of it" ("Essay," pp. 69-70).

Principiis obsta (Oppose the beginnings)! That is the important principle to remember and to act upon in all these cases. The advice is excellent; the only difficulty seems to be in carrying it out. "What stands in the way is the radical

inclination of human nature to give attention to things which cause pleasure, even without any design of pursuing them, and this can be counteracted only by cultivating a deep and constant aversion to sin, and to anything which tends to sin."

St. Jerome writes: "Very many most saintly men have fallen into this vice through their sense of security. Let no one trust in this. If you are holy, you are nevertheless not secure. . . . You are a man of common clay and liable to folly. Can you grasp fire and not burn?"

Whatever may be said of the difficulties and the dangers connected with the vow of celibacy, there can be no doubt whatever as to the wisdom of the Church in imposing it on her sacred ministers. Of course, there will be temptations to overcome, dangerous channels to navigate, and delicate situations to surmount, but these difficulties will but add to our eternal reward, if faithfully overcome and turned to account, as they generally are. The famous Dr. W. G. Ward, speaking of such temptations (which he described as "propensions of the flesh"), says: "Priests are called by God to the admirable height of refusing all gratification to this propension; yet, even to them—which might seem strange—it performs most important services.

There can be no doubt that, through the arduousness of that conflict which they have to sustain, habits of humility and watchfulness are engendered in a far higher degree than would otherwise be the case. . . . Then, secondly, a great additional motive is supplied them for the practice of perfection, *viz.*, the fear lest God should otherwise refuse them the grace whereby they shall in fact triumph over the assaults of this propension. And lastly, by the triumph itself (in those who are victorious) an invaluable element, both of heroism and of tenderness, accrues to the character" ("Nature and Grace," pp. 354-355).

Even non-Catholic writers who have no love for the Church are often struck by the prudence and the far-seeing wisdom of her discipline and regulations. Thus, the well-known historian, Buckle, breaks out in the following strain: "Of all the contrivances of the Catholic Church to extend her power, the celibacy of the clergy is one of the most important, and, from whatever side we view it, must be regarded as a masterpiece of political wisdom. By freeing the priest from domestic embarrassments, it not only enables him with the greater ease to maintain his rank in society, but induces him to concentrate his energies on the interests of his Order. Sec-

ondly, by debarring him from the hope of legitimate posterity, it prevents the introduction of that spirit of hereditary descent, which has always been fatal to every class in which it has long and exclusively existed" (cfr. *Fraser's Magazine*, August, 1867, p. 143).

I will content myself with but one more strong appreciation of the law of celibacy from a non-Catholic source. In his book entitled "Human Intercourse" (p. 187), Ph. Hamerton expresses himself in the following words: "In a celibate church the priest has a position of secure dignity and independence. It is known from the first that he will not marry, so there is no idle and damaging gossip about his supposed aspirations after fortune, or tender feelings toward beauty. Women can treat him with greater confidence than if he were a possible suitor, and then can confess to him, which is felt to be difficult with a married or a marriageable clergyman. By being celibate, the clergy avoid the possible loss of dignity which might result from allying themselves with families in a low social position. They are simply priests, and escape all other classification. A married man is, as it were, made responsible for the decent appearance, the good manners, and the proper conduct of three sets of people. There is the family he

springs from, there is his wife's family, and lastly there is the family in his own house."

The more carefully we consider the matter, the more we shall realize the wisdom and the prudence of the Church in her legislation.

CHAPTER XIII

GATES OF HELL.—III. INTEMPERANCE

"No drunkards shall possess the kingdom of God" (I Cor., vi. 10).

HELL has a thousand gates through which devils drag the souls of men and women who are condemned by the justice of God to that awful "place of torments" (Luke, xvi. 28). But, as already said, there are generally speaking but three of these gates through which fallen priests are likely to pass. They are known as AVARICE, IMPURITY and INTEMPERANCE. We have already spoken of the first two, and we shall now say a few words about the last. Intemperance may, of course, be referred to quite a number of different things, but here we are dealing only with intemperance in drink—or, in other words, with the curse of drunkenness. If avarice and impurity are far more odious than intemperance, intemperance is far more common.

Even the most serious falls of a priest in this matter begin, as a rule, by slow degrees. He

almost always begins by taking just a little more than is really good for him. Then the inclination grows imperceptibly, and he allows himself a trifle more and a trifle more, until at last he exceeds all moderation.

A priest, especially on a solitary mission, sometimes feels the need of a little stimulant. His life is often a solitary one. Unlike a man of the world, he has no wife to comfort him, no children to amuse and entertain him. He is not allowed to seek relaxation at the theater or the opera, or on the race course and in other places where laymen can always find change and amusement and relief from the troubles and anxieties of life. In fact, almost the only purely worldly indulgence open to him is the indulgence of his palate. It goes without saying that a priest should be above such indulgences. But, if he has lost his first fervor and if he weakly seeks some little solace, he will find it more readily and more easily in drink than in anything else that lies readily within his reach. Hence the danger. He is perfectly well aware, even though the Scriptures were silent on the point, that "wine cheereth the heart of man" (Ps., ciii. 15), and that even the Holy Spirit Himself, speaking through the lips of Solomon, bids us "give strong drink to them that are sad,

and wine to them who are grieved in mind" (Prov. xxxi. 6). So, in moments of depression and solitude and sadness, he is naturally tempted to arouse his sunken energies by having recourse to the whiskey bottle. Perhaps he has been a little overworked. He is weary and tired. He (or is it the devil?) thinks that just a tiny drop of spirits will do him good, drive off dull care, and act as a pick-me-up. He tries the suggested remedy once or twice, and finds the result satisfactory. In fact, it really seems to dispel that languor and feeling of lassitude that was creeping upon him. Up to this point, there is perhaps not very much to find fault with. But *he is introducing the thin end of the wedge.* He repeats the dose again and again. It soon grows into a habit. Then it rapidly gains strength. In a short time, it domineers over him so that he indulges himself without much restraint, and very often without at all realizing that he has already passed far beyond the limits of strict sobriety. After they have reached that stage, many become regular tipplers, and disgrace their ministry, scandalize their flock, and break the heart of their bishop by appearing unmistakably drunk even in public—sometimes alas! in the sanctuary and clothed with sacred vestments!

Intemperance is not only a most degrading and a most heinous crime in a priest, but, sad to say, it is most difficult to cure. Once the passion for strong drink is aroused and takes possession of a man, he becomes a perfect slave to it. Even though he repents, acknowledges his sin, and resolves to abandon the evil habit altogether, he rarely succeeds. I have known priests who have shown the greatest sincerity in their resolve to give up their intemperate habits, and who have willingly taken even extraordinary means to secure success, but who yet have failed. Consequently, while I have been much edified by their heroic efforts, I have been still more appalled by their ill-success. I will cite but one example.

A certain priest, whom I will call Father Z, became such a disgrace to the whole country around that his bishop, after many earnest warnings, suspended him. For a long time he remained without exercising any priestly function. Again and again he besought the bishop to reinstate him and give him a mission, but the bishop never dared. At last, however, when many of his friends interceded for him, His Lordship gave way so far at least as to promise to reinstate him on one condition, though the condition was by no means an easy

one. It was that he should travel a long distance to a certain Trappist Monastery, and remain there two years, leading a regular, mortified and temperate life. "If," said the bishop, "the abbot gives a good account of you at the end of that period, I will receive you back, and give you a mission."

The poor penitent fellow actually agreed to the terms, and did exactly as he was asked. At the conclusion of the two years, the bishop received a perfectly satisfactory account of his erring subject from the abbot, and, true to his promise, reinstated him and placed him at the head of a small parish in his diocese. But such is the weakness of poor human nature, he had not been in the parish four-and-twenty hours before he was hopelessly drunk again.

No one, I suppose, can doubt of his sincerity. No one will say that he did not most truly wish to correct himself and to lead a sober and priestly life for the future. The readiness with which he acceded to the bishop's very hard conditions is proof enough of both the genuineness and the strength of his desire to put himself right with God and man. Yet, finding himself once more his own master and with strong drink within reach, he incautiously allowed himself merely "a taste," but, even after two years of

restraint, the mere taste brought back the craving, and like a tiny spark set the whole passion on fire once more. It is far easier to keep oneself from all overindulgence than to cure oneself of the evil habit of intemperance, once it has taken possession of our souls.

"There are many demons that walk this earth and do their worst to slay the immortal souls of men," says Bishop Hedley. "There is Pride, there is Impurity, there is Sloth or Spiritual Indifference, and there is Love of Money. All these have to be fought or we shall perish; and this ceaseless fight gives our human life its seriousness and its peril. But the Drink-temptation differs in many ways from all the other evil influences, which threaten to draw us down to hell. The inclination to drink to excess is by no means so inborn in us as pride, luxury, or laziness. Again, far more commonly than other inclinations, it is traceable to the bodily constitution, either inherited from parents or as perverted and corrupted by willful excess."

In avoiding it great circumspection is required. "It is the plain duty of every man, who is conscious of weakness in regard to drink, to make a serious and constant effort to avoid occasions and opportunities. There are places, and

persons, and acts, which may be innocent in themselves, but which *to certain temperaments are deadly sin.* If a man has within himself the drink-craving, he can keep it quiet and get rid of it only by shunning like a pestilence the presence of drink. For such a man to enter convivial company where strong drinks are being passed around, is like putting his head on the railway metals before the rush of the express; he cannot hope not to be killed. For such a man the presence of alcoholic liquor within the four walls of his dwelling is like the presence of a rattlesnake; only a miracle can save him from death. For such a man to join a friend in drink is to touch the shaft that is charged with lightning; his fate is instantaneous and inevitable. Therefore, such a man is *bound, even under pain of deadly sin, to avoid such occasions.* All those who know by experience that they are more or less certain to fall, if this temptation comes in their way, must avoid the places, the persons, the acts, and the occasions that will cause the temptation."

Regarding the resolution of total abstinence, we need only say that for some few it may be absolutely necessary, inasmuch as there are some who cannot save their souls without it.

But it is also highly meritorious in those who do not require it. It is a most admirable practice of Christian self-denial.

In a Brief addressed to Archbishop Ireland of St. Paul, Minnesota (1887), Pope Leo XIII, after reciting some of the evils occasioned by intemperance, said: "We commend, in the highest degree, those pious societies which so nobly propose to practise total abstinence from all intoxicants. It cannot be doubted that such a pledge (*firma voluntas*) is an opportune and most efficacious remedy for this most grievous evil; and, the greater the authority of those who make it, the greater is the influence of their good example in restraining others from intemperance; *especially powerful in this matter will be the zeal of priests.*"

I have spoken of *avarice,* of *impurity* and of *intemperance,* which are universally considered the three most dangerous rocks upon which most erring priests suffer shipwreck. Of other dangers I will not speak except to say that perhaps some, though not so many, fall through pride and disobedience. A little humility would, no doubt, have saved the famous Dr. Döllinger, who refused to submit to the Decrees of the Vatican Council; and a little prompt obedience

to his Provincial would have rescued and saved from disaster the well-known Father Tyrrell, S.J. But for their pride and disobedience, both of these remarkable men might have died peacefully and in full union with the Holy Catholic Church. In times past, we have also had several examples of great preachers whose heads have been turned by phenomenal success, and by reason of the power and influence they were able to exercise over the immense crowds which followed them wherever they chanced to preach. We might give names, but we will refrain. However, we may here observe that we well remember an Irish Bishop being asked in our presence:

"By the way, my Lord, what has become of Father X? I have not heard of him for a long time."

"Oh," replied the bishop, "poor fellow, he took to preaching, and went to the devil!"

He spoke almost as though to be a popular preacher were a short cut to the infernal regions. It is certainly worth notice that the really famous preachers who have died most holy and edifying deaths have been remarkable beyond their fellows for their profound humility, such as Père Lacordaire and Father Tom Burke.

Great success, great applause, and exceptional power and influence, even in the work of God, are terrible dangers for those who have not deep roots of humility. Let us be on our guard!

CHAPTER XIV

VENIAL SIN IN A PRIEST

"Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall render an account of it in the day of judgment" (Matt., xii. 36).

OF all the subjects that can occupy our attention, one of the most important and practical is most undoubtedly that of venial sin. It seems to deserve more careful consideration even than mortal sin, and for three special and weighty reasons. In the first place, because all priests, even the most recollected and devout, fall sometimes into venial sins, at all events into indeliberate venial sins, whereas the vast majority of them, we may surely believe, succeed in keeping themselves altogether free from grosser crimes. In the second place, because it is obvious that incitements to really grave offenses are comparatively rare, and arise but occasionally, while temptations to commit lesser faults may rise to challenge our loyalty to God a thousand times a day. Thirdly, for the most important reason

of all, because if only we can be got thoroughly to realize the unspeakable and absolutely appalling malice and ingratitude of venial sin, and if only we can excite within ourselves a horror and a detestation of it even distantly approaching that which it truly deserves, we may rest assured that our hatred of mortal sin will become proportionally more intense, and that we shall prefer a thousand times to make any sacrifice rather than defile our souls with such an abominable stain.

To explain the immense evil of venial sin, we must call to mind that the gravity of an offense is measured, not only by the nature of the offense, but also by the dignity of the person offended. If I am found plotting against the life of one of my companions, it is serious enough. But if I am detected plotting against the life of a king or ruler, it is a totally different thing, and is called by a different name. Because of the position of the man offended, my crime becomes *high treason*. It is judged by different laws. It is more severely punished, and, in the eyes of all loyal subjects, I should be stained with far greater ignominy and disgrace.

This is found to be the case, though we know there is no intrinsic superiority of a king over his subject. But, when the person offended is not

merely invested with a brief authority but is in very truth raised above the offender by an infinite distance, the offense cannot well be measured. God is an infinite Being. The entire creation is so insignificant, compared to Him, that all the Scripture can say is that it is "as though it were not." Hence, before we can measure with any degree of accuracy the enormity of the least venial sin, it is essential that we should measure the infinite majesty and dominion of God, which no created intelligence can ever hope to do adequately either in this world or in the next. It is beyond all calculation. It is one of those facts which we must take on faith, for it exceeds our powers of investigation, though, as soon as we admit that God is Infinite Perfection, it at once follows from pure reason.

Here I may quote the words of the well-known writer, A. Bellecius, S.J., who observed: "If, by committing one little venial sin, we could prevent all wars, famines, inundations, diseases, and pestilences, and if we could extinguish the fires of Purgatory and of Hell itself and do away with every other calamity, it would be absolutely unlawful for us to commit it. If, by one such little offense, we could save the whole human race, and secure eternal happiness for every

man, woman and child now living or hereafter to be created, we should be obliged to refuse to stain ourselves with such a sin. This," he adds, "is certain, and a dogma of Faith, which it would be impious to deny. For all these evils are evils that affect creatures, whereas sin, even venial sin, is an evil against God. Therefore, by as much as the Creator is above the creature, by so much is sin above every other evil" (*Triduum Sacrum*, p. 9).

The same doctrine is repeated in similar words by every authority, when treating of this subject. We will quote but one other, who shall be Cardinal Newman. We select him because he always expresses himself with so much clearness and elegance. In his book, "Anglican Difficulties," he informs his readers: "The Church holds that it were better that sun and moon should drop from heaven, and for the earth to fail, and for all the many millions who are on it to die of starvation in extremest agony (so far as temporal affliction goes), than that *one soul, I will not say should be lost, but should commit one venial sin.*"

Yet, in spite of this undoubted fact, there is hardly anything so common as venial sin. In fact, we are all more or less culprits. Of the whole human race, there is but one grown up

person who is known to have been entirely free from even the slightest blemish during the whole of her life, and that is the ever Blessed Virgin, and even she was exempt, as theologians tell us, "by a singular privilege of God" (*singulari Dei privilegio*). As for the rest of us, St. James tells us that "in many things we all offend" (iii. 2), and in the Third Book of Kings (viii. 46) we read the inspired words: "There is no man who sinneth not." Our own consciences, too, will bear out the truth of these words, and teach us to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt us in the time of visitation (I Peter, v. 6).

We must, of course, distinguish between *deliberate* venial sins and such as are committed through inattention, human frailty, surprise, and so forth, which are not deliberate. It is only these latter that all men must certainly fall into from time to time. The best theologians will tell us, that, if thoroughly in earnest, we are given the power by God to avoid all *deliberate* venial sins, though it is to be feared that many of us do not make the effort, and that our weekly confessions bear witness to our want of zeal in this matter. The truth is, we do not at all realize the atrocious malice of even the least venial sin. Even when we fall, we dismiss the

affair, saying: "After all, it was *only* a venial sin," as though that were of no very serious import.

If we take the trouble to investigate the cause of our utterly defective and wholly inadequate estimate of the evil of venial sin, I think we shall find it arises from three chief causes.

(1) The first is because of our acquaintance with what is so immeasurably worse—I mean mortal sin. Even though we may keep from mortal sin ourselves, we see it committed all around us. Every paper we pick up tells us of murders, suicides, drunkenness, theft, immodesty, fighting, quarreling, and much besides, and, when compared to these enormities, it is true that our own venial offenses, not merely appear, but *really are small and trivial.* Thus, the thought of the immense number of mortal sins that are being daily—and, may we not say, hourly?—committed all over the world, leads us gradually to think less and less of those other offenses which do not kill the soul, but yet offend and outrage the infinite majesty of God. There is much need, therefore, to remember what the infallible Church of God teaches on the subject, and not trust to our own view; for, as the sun, owing to its vastly greater brilliancy, wholly eclipses the light of the stars, so the vastly

greater evil of mortal sin is in danger of wholly eclipsing in our eyes the deplorable evil of the least venial sin.

(2) A second reason why we fail to gauge the full malice of venial sin is, because we are living in the world, which is "the enemy of God," and are inclined often almost unconsciously to accept its views and opinions. Now, in the eyes of the world, venial sins are of no consequence whatsoever. The world attaches no importance to such things. It laughs and makes merry over them. It will refuse to call them sins at all, and has no scruple in committing them. Now, if we are not careful, we shall find ourselves influenced by this public opinion. Little by little, we shall acquiesce in the prevailing judgment. We shall feel some hesitation in admitting that we know better than our neighbors what view we should take of faults into which so many around us fall without hesitation or without any qualms of conscience. Just as the damp atmosphere of the physical world will very soon tarnish bright steel exposed to its influences, and cover it with rust, which will at last eat it away, so the irreligious atmosphere of the social world will very soon tarnish the brightest conscience, and cover it with the rust of moral error, which, if unat-

tended to, will at last eat into it and altogether destroy its power of reflecting the truth. We must be on our guard against such stealthy and often unsuspected encroachments of the world so "that we be not condemned with it" (I Cor., xi. 32). Let us remember that "the wisdom of this world is folly in the eyes of God" (I Cor., iii. 19).

(3) Then, there is a third reason why we are not so deeply impressed with the gravity of even the least offense against God, as men were under the Old Dispensation, and that is because God no longer punishes venial sin *in this world* as He used to do from time to time before the coming of Christ. When men began to grow more than usually careless, God would arouse and startle them with a sudden exhibition of His power and His indignation. Thus, when the Bethsamites paid insufficient reverence to the Ark of the Covenant as it was being conveyed through their territory, He at once slew fifty thousand of them, and brought those who witnessed the punishment to a better sense of what was due to this sacred object. We have another example in the case of Mary, the sister of Moses. She had dared to murmur against her brother, which was no more than a venial sin, yet God manifested His displeasure by striking

her from head to foot with a hideous leprosy. Nor did He spare even Moses himself, His chosen servant. In consequence of some momentary want of perfect trust in God, when commanded to strike the rock that water might gush forth, his life was cut short, and he was not allowed to enter the Promised Land, for which he had so much yearned, and towards which he had traveled for forty years through the desert. So, again, we are told that David, because of a slight sin of vanity in numbering his people, was punished by God, who sent a pestilence among his subjects that swept off no less than seventy thousand of them in a few days. Such chastisements, could we behold them, would help us to appraise the malice of venial sin more correctly than we do now. But God no longer punishes venial sin in such striking and visible ways in these days. He punishes it far more severely in the terrible flames of Purgatory, when the soul passes out of our sight; but, because our faith is dull and we cannot actually behold its agonies, we are little moved. There are many who think little of telling inconsequential lies, of making somewhat uncharitable remarks, or of giving way to willful distractions at prayer. But, if every time they told a lie a painful blister

should arise on their tongue, if every time they acted uncharitably they were tormented with the ague, or if every willful distraction in prayer were to be visited, and at once, with some dreadful deformity, how exceedingly few would be found to indulge their evil inclinations and passions even in a venial degree! Yet, because the punishment is delayed, we seem to fancy that we may with impunity despise and make little of venial offenses.

It is all very well to say: "I did not think I was doing anything so very wrong," or, "I never considered such things so serious, or so exceedingly displeasing to God," and so on. But surely it is our business to know and to think! And we priests especially, who have to teach others, and who are placed here to be "the light of the world" (Matt., v. 14) and "to give knowledge of salvation to His people" (Luke, i. 77), should be the very first to understand these things, and to form the most exact and accurate estimate of what is due to Him, who, as St. Peter reminds us, "hath called us out of darkness into His marvelous light" (I Peter, ii. 9).

Yet, how very few really bring home to themselves and thoroughly convince themselves that each time they willfully give way to a feeling of pride, or of vanity, or of sensuality in eating

or drinking, or any other venial sin, they have been guilty of what is in itself a greater evil than if (without sin) they had caused the death of every man, woman and child in the entire world!

Let us consider an example. When perhaps we were at a party, or a convivial gathering of priests, we chatted away without much reflection. Did we, when we spoke disparagingly of a brother-priest, or boasted of our success in an argument, or criticized in a reprehensible way the conduct of our superiors, or committed some other indiscretion, which (let us grant) amounted to only a venial sin—did we feel conscious that we were guilty of a greater evil than if we had let loose the floodgates of heaven and the fountains of the deep, and caused another deluge, and destroyed all flesh?

Even the saints could hardly realize the enormity of venial sin, but, because they were saints, they realized it with far greater accuracy than we do. We are told by his novice-master that St. Aloysius swooned away with sorrow when he revealed exceedingly light sins to him. St. Catherine of Genoa often declared that she would rather suffer the torments of hell than offend God by the least fault. St. Anselm taught that the blessed in Heaven would much rather forfeit all their indescribable happiness for all

eternity than offer the slightest insult to Almighty God. And St. Alphonsus Rodriguez used to pray, each time he went out for a walk, that he might rather fall down dead at the threshold than violate even in the least degree the commands of God. "If," exclaimed St. Catherine of Siena, "an immortal soul could die, the mere sight of a soul in venial sin would kill it." This last statement seems to be confirmed by what we read in the *Life* of St. Teresa, for she relates that, "having received from God some special light regarding the deformity of some venial faults into which she had fallen, she felt herself oppressed with a shame and confusion more intolerable to her than the pains of Hell itself" (*Vita, apud Joghner,* chap. 40).

The merits of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, most fortunately for us are more than enough fully to atone for all possible sin. As St. Thomas reminds us, "one drop of Christ's Blood shed in His circumcision, or any expiation whatsoever on His part, rendered full satisfaction in virtue of His Person." One drop of Christ's Precious Blood would suffice to cancel the sins of ten thousand worlds, had they all fallen into sin, but, in spite of this fact, let us conclude this chapter on venial sin

by calling to mind that, *apart from His merits,* nothing that we of ourselves could do, could make adequate atonement for as much as one little sin. By grace we are now made children of God and "partakers of the divine nature" (II Peter, i. 4), so that, being united to Him, and forming *one body with Him* (I Cor., i. 27), our actions become meritorious and satisfactory by reason of the application of the infinite merits of Christ. But let us try to esteem the enormity of even venial sin by remembering that, *in themselves and apart from the merits of Christ,* all the prayers, vigils, tears, penances, flagellations and fasts of all the saints, all the agonies endured and the blood shed by the martyrs, and all the sacrifices of all the monks, hermits, and anchorites who have ever lived, would not avail to satisfy for a single venial sin. Now, of course, a slight penance or even a genuine act of heartfelt sorrow and love may efface such sins, but that is because the Incarnate Son of God acts with us and through us, and abides in our hearts by grace, so that we are not alone.

How great and how dastardly must that sin be, though we foolishly think so lightly of it, that cannot be adequately atoned for by the tears and sufferings and prayers and martyrdoms of all men, both living and dead!

Finally, let us remember that an infinitely just God, who has the greatest love for all His creatures that are in a state of grace, punishes their venial offenses with the utmost severity. We are assured that, in spite of the raging fires and the Cimmerian darkness and the other tortures endured by the lost in hell, it is not these but the *pain of loss* that the damned feel with the *greatest* acuteness. Yet, it is this precise pain that the souls in Purgatory suffer. In their case, it is of course but temporary; but, for the time being, they are deprived of God. They might be enjoying God at this moment, yet some slight sin keeps them back and prevents them, for a shorter or longer time, from "entering into the joys of the Lord." They may be said, in a sense, to be enduring the very worst agony of the damned (*i.e.*, the pain of loss), for their sins, though but venial, close the doors of heaven to them, until they have been wholly expiated. For the time they have forfeited all access to God. They long for Him with unspeakable longing. They feel an immense—yea, a measureless—attraction, but their venial offenses rise up like a wall of brass, and hide the infinite beauty and delights of God's presence from them. We may perhaps form some

notion of the agony felt by a loving daughter, torn from her mother's outstretched arms, or a lover wrenched violently from the embrace of his beloved, but no notion can ever be formed of the acute pain and the insufferable agony of separation for a soul in love with a Being of infinite excellence and of ravishing perfection and of eternal and uncreated loveliness. We may try and picture the keenness of the torture as long as we like, but we can no more form a true estimate of it with our present finite minds than we can measure the most distant star with a twelve-inch rule, or sound the depths of space with a yardstick. Till we can accurately realize the full beauty of the infinite Creator, and understand His incomprehensible magnificence and majesty, we shall fall short *by an infinite distance* of realizing what a soul, in a state of grace and created with all the requisite capacities for enjoying Him, must suffer by reason of the imperfections that forcibly interfere with this union between the soul and God, in which indeed perfect beatitude consists. No examples can help us; no illustrations can be of the least service, because every example and illustration must necessarily be of finite beings, whereas here we are dealing with God Himself, who is

removed from all creatures by an infinite distance and whose attractions are absolutely beyond all measure or conception.

Of course, the pain in the case of the damned is worse beyond words, because they know their loss is eternal and irreparable, but even the soul in Purgatory suffers from this *temporary* loss far more than we are inclined to imagine.

Surely, with this thought before us, we shall resolve to make no truce with sins of any kind, however slight they may be when compared with mortal sins, but will resolve to exercise every care and watchfulness and solicitude to live without ever committing any deliberate fault, be it what it may.

Let us commend ourselves and our resolve to the protection of the one and only pure creature—"our tainted nature's solitary boast"—whose immaculate soul was never, even in the slightest degree, unfaithful to her God and her divine Son. Mary Immaculate! Pray for thy children!

CHAPTER XV

NATURE OF VENIAL SIN

"He that contemneth small things shall fall by little and little" (Ecclus., xix. 1).

ALTHOUGH mortal sin is essentially different to venial sin—so different indeed that no number of venial sins, however great, can equal in malice one mortal sin—yet every venial sin contains the elements of mortal sin. Thus, to enumerate the chief, every time we commit a deliberate venial sin:

(1) we offer Almighty God a gratuitous insult;

(2) we choose evil instead of good;

(3) we put *ourselves* in the first place, and *God* in the second;

(4) we exclaim *"Non serviam,"* and indulge our own perverse will, instead of submitting to the will of God;

(5) we refuse in practice to recognize the absolute sovereignty of God.

Hence, it is manifest that (with the exception

of mortal sin) there is no evil that can equal or even approach the evil of venial sin. It should not surprise us, therefore, to learn that the consequences of even venial offenses are extremely serious, and that we must wage a determined and ceaseless war against them.

The chief and most appalling effect of any carelessness in this matter is that it leads to mortal sin, while mortal sin leads to eternal damnation. Thus, to give a single example, we read in the *Life* of St. Teresa that, although she was never guilty of mortal sin, still she had a vision of a place prepared for her in hell, not indeed on account of her venial sins, but on account of the sins to which *these venial sins would inevitably have led her,* had she not risen to a higher degree of fervor and to a sanctity of life inconsistent even with venial sin.

Let us now consider some of the various ways in which venial sin gradually and artfully prepares the way for a serious fall.

(1) The first evil effect of carelessness in the matter of venial sin is that it diminishes our horror and fear of sin in general. So soon as ever we begin to think lightly of venial offenses, we shall think less of mortal sins. A man who has a true estimate of the malice of venial sin, and who resolutely strives to avoid it at any

cost, will instinctively shrink with terror at the mere prospect of mortal sin. But one who allows himself to fall easily into venial faults, will allow himself a little more and still a little more liberty, until at last he will easily cross the border which separates venial from mortal sin. "He that contemneth small things, shall fall by little and little" (Ecclus., xix. 1). This is a *natural* effect of sinful indulgence, which is serious enough, but there is also a still more serious *supernatural* effect, to which we must now draw attention.

(2) To those who serve God faithfully, and who show themselves anxious not to offend Him even in the slightest degree, He bestows a wonderfully clear perception of the seriousness of venial sin. So long as we keep our consciences free from all deliberate sin, God rewards us by flooding our minds with spiritual light, whereby we obtain a marvelous insight into spiritual values, and are rendered able to judge things almost as God Himself judges them. This explains the inspired words of holy David, who says: "I have had understanding above ancients because I have sought Thy commandments"; and again: "I have understood more than all my teachers, because Thy testimonies are my meditation" (Ps., cxviii. 99, 100). The truth

of this is made manifest in the lives of all the saints. Their indescribable horror of even the least sin was most evident, and it increased in proportion to the care they took to keep themselves wholly undefiled. They realized the importance of this, for they knew that according to God's plan venial sin diminishes the interior light, obscures the judgment, and tends to conceal the Face of God, much as clouds conceal the sun. On the other hand, God is more intimately present to those who are innocent, and they not only see Him, but are much more sensitive to what will offend or displease Him. "Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God" (Matt., v. 8).

(3) A third effect of venial sin is that it weakens our will, and renders us, not only less willing, but less able to resist temptations to mortal sin. Like every other faculty of our complicated being, the will admits of development. It grows stronger and more vigorous by exercise. Opportunities of exercising our will come before us a hundred times a day. The devil, the world, and the flesh are ceaselessly inviting us to violate the law of God in a great variety of small ways. Now a man who steadfastly refuses to listen to their evil suggestions is *perpetually exercising and strengthening his*

will. In fact, by dint of this steady and frequent exercise, his will becomes more and more completely under his control, and grows less and less influenced by external and forbidden attractions. Every time he resists and overcomes his inclinations, he makes it easier for himself to overcome more serious assaults, and renders the likelihood of a serious fall more and more remote.

With a careless man who indulges his inclinations so long as he escapes mortal sin, it is just the reverse. He, too, is training his will. He accustoms it to yield to its desires. And, the oftener these are indulged, the more they demand, and the more imperious they grow. We may begin by allowing only what is venially sinful. But it is the very nature of all passions to increase in strength and violence every time we yield to their demands. If we accustom ourselves to disobey the law of God *in little things,* we form a habit, and (as it is said) "habit becomes a second nature." So that, when solicited by some really dangerous temptation, the chances are that the strength of the habit will assert itself, and we shall fall miserably.

We all know what a difference it makes, when we are in the water, whether we are swimming *with* the stream or *against* it. If in some broad

river we are swimming with the current, our progress is certain and easy; but, if we are trying to make our way against the current, our task is difficult, our progress most uncertain, and very likely, in spite of our best efforts, we shall be carried backwards instead of forwards by the force of the swift-flowing waters. Now, it is the same in the spiritual life. Two men are on their trial in this world. The one is constantly denying himself, whenever tempted to venial sin, and refusing consent; the other makes no serious effort to resist such assaults, and readily gives way, because what he is asked to do is only venially wrong. Each thus constructs for himself a "stream of tendency." The one is swimming in a stream in which the whole current is flowing in the direction of self-denial; it is entirely in his favor. The other swims in a stream in which the whole current is flowing in the direction of self-indulgence, and has formed a strong habit of yielding. How will the latter suddenly gather up strength to act in direct opposition to that long-formed habit—to that "second nature"—and bravely resist the much stronger solicitation to a grave dereliction of duty? His past practice in regard to venial falls has made his position extremely difficult

and dangerous. In his case the strong current is against him.

We thus see that the practice of yielding to venial faults produces two very lamentable results. It adds to and increases the force of temptation, and at the same time it renders us far less capable of resisting it. It endows our spiritual enemies with immensely greater power to attack, and at the same time very much lessens our strength to resist these attacks. Thus, venial sin paves the way and opens out an easy path to mortal sin.

(4) Yet another disastrous consequence following from the commission of venial sin is, that it deprives us of those altogether special helps that God is wont to bestow upon those who serve Him with studious fidelity. Though venial sins do not deprive us of the grace which is in us, yet, by committing them, we forfeit all claim to those *extraordinary and choice graces* which God loves to grant to His more devoted and loving children, and without which they may very easily on occasion fall into grievous sin. The truth is, God is accustomed to deal with us as we deal with Him. If we show altogether special care to keep His commandments, and are generous and devoted to His

service, He will likewise oe so much the more careful to watch over us, when exposed to danger, and will be more lavish and generous in His graces when we most need them. In fact, "He will teach our hands to war, and will make our arms like a bow of brass," so that, instead of being overcome, "we shall pursue after our enemies, and crush them." For then we shall be able to exclaim with Samuel: "The Lord hath girded us with strength to battle, and hath made them that resisted us to bow under us" (II Kings, xxii. 35-40). It is quite certain that God cannot be outdone in generosity, and that, the more careful we are to please Him, the more carefully He will watch over us, and guard our interests, and shield us from all peril. But, by a habit of deliberate venial sin, we render ourselves altogether unworthy of such *special* solicitude, and must not expect to be guarded by Him as the very "apple of His eye" (Ps., xvi. 8). For this is the exclusive privilege of favored souls, who are at least aiming at perfection, as every priest by reason of his exalted vocation is bound to aim.

(5) Another consideration which should have considerable weight with every religiously minded man, is the thought of the immense and eternal losses that we suffer by not overcoming

venial faults. Though we may not advert to them, these losses are really very serious, and will interfere with the position we shall occupy forever in heaven, if we are fortunate enough to be saved. Suffer me to explain. Suppose I am tempted to commit some venial sin. Now, either I resist it or I give way. If I give way, I have acted as a poltroon, and have been more wicked than if (without sin) I had brought about another deluge, and had destroyed all flesh, etc., etc. But let us suppose I have, by God's help, resisted and overcome. Now, we must bear in mind that, in so doing, I have not merely stood, where I might have fallen; no, I have done far more than that. I have fought the good fight; I have gained a distinct victory; I have proved my loyalty to God, and routed His enemy. And, as a direct consequence of this correspondence with grace, I acquire, *hic et nunc,* an increase of grace. But every increase of grace carries with it a claim to a corresponding additional increase of glory in heaven. And every increase of eternal glory in heaven means God more fully possessed, more thoroughly understood, more ardently enjoyed, and more intensely loved, for the whole of eternity! Try and realize what that means.

One degree of divine grace is more precious

than the riches of a thousand worlds, because one degree of grace will purchase for us a corresponding additional degree of eternal glory; yet we are empowered to gain additional degrees of grace every single time we overcome, when tempted to sin, even venial sin. Just think what we lose by throwing away such chances? Try and form some estimate of the prodigious loss we sustain, in a lifetime, in a year, or even in a month—yea, in a single day—by our habit of refusing to deny ourselves and refrain from venial sin when the opportunity arises. Well may the inspired writer say: "Blessed is the man who endureth temptation" (James, i. 12), since the rewards of victory are so gigantic and stupendous and so everlasting. But still more astonishing is the extraordinary apathy and indifference of priests, who should be more keenly alive than any other persons to the value of supernatural rewards, and far more anxious to take our Blessed Lord's advice and "heap up for themselves treasures in heaven." It is to be feared that more show themselves anxious to heap up the "immortal dollars" here on earth than to lay up spiritual riches, where "rust does not consume, and where thieves do not break through and steal" (Matt., vi. 19). Let them begin by struggling more valiantly against all

venial sin and moral imperfection, however slight.

In conclusion, let us remember that the one chief aim of every priest should be to render himself more and more worthy of the love of God, and that, to secure this result, he must do all he can to keep his soul innocent and free from every deliberate stain of sin. Perfect innocence was the gift beyond every other that God Incarnate chose for His Blessed Mother. Just think what a light this fact throws upon its value in His eyes! Place before your mind a Being of infinite power, with unlimited resources at His command, who possesses complete control over all creation, and who can do whatsoever He wills. As a Son, He fulfills His own command, and desires to honor His Mother. Out of His limitless and boundless treasury He will therefore select the very best gift, the most priceless pearl, with which to enrich and beautify the soul of her who is to be Queen of Heaven. He bestows upon her that which He, in His infinite wisdom, prizes most—that which He esteems beyond all else, that without which all else is valueless—and that is perfect purity, innocence, and freedom from sin. Yes, the one human being whom God loved above every other, and about whose state and

condition He was most concerned, He deliberately left in pain, and want, and sorrow, and humiliation. And why? Because He wished to show us that these things do not matter. In His eyes only one thing matters, and that is stainlessness. The one gem of dazzling beauty, the one pearl of fabulous price which would raise her above all her race and distinguish her from all other human beings, was complete immunity from all moral guilt; so He made her Immaculate.

Surely, this action on the part of Almighty God points to and enforces a most practical lesson which we priests, especially, would do well to lay to heart. It proves that, if we wish to render ourselves pleasing to God, we must above all things wage a fierce and unrelenting war with sin; and that the more carefully and resolutely we guard ourselves against even venial faults and imperfections—in other words, *the more closely we resemble the Immaculate Mother of God*—the more we shall grow in God's favor. *Beata Mater et intacta Virgo, gloriosa Regina mundi, intercede pro nobis ad Dominum!*

CHAPTER XVI

OUR PLAN OF CAMPAIGN

"The life of man upon earth is a warfare" (Job, vii. 1).

THE Scriptures tell us, in infallible words, that "man's life upon earth is a warfare." So long as life lasts, we have to contend with powerful and unscrupulous enemies who are perpetually seeking our destruction. Now, the question arises: How shall we overcome and utterly defeat them? It seems to me that we may learn an important lesson from the most famous generals who have fought successfully against earthly foes, and apply their methods to the spiritual warfare in which we are perpetually engaged.

No great general begins a campaign by striking indiscriminately and at haphazard. On the contrary, his first duty is carefully to study and consider the position and the strength and resources of the enemy, and then to form a well-considered *plan of campaign*. This is by far the

most vital and important step in the whole undertaking. On the wisdom and the perfection of his plan, the entire issue of the war will largely depend. In fact, the greatness of the general will be revealed by the manner in which he handles his troops, and by the accuracy with which he places them in the field.

Now, if we are to wage a successful warfare against our spiritual enemies, we must adopt a similar strategy.

Sin is our only real enemy. Our first duty, therefore, is carefully to study and consider its nature and characteristics. If we do so, we shall find that all sins may be reduced practically to two classes. Though sins are of an almost infinite variety, and though they seem to assume endless forms and shapes, yet they may all be ranged under one of two heads. Every possible sin, no matter what may be its exact species, will be found on examination to be a sin of (1) *sensuality,* or else a sin of (2) *pride.* In other words, we sin either because we wish some sensual indulgence, or else because we will not bring our minds into subjection.

Let us illustrate this by taking any common sins at random. Suppose, then, that a penitent comes to confession, and accuses himself first of missing Mass on a Sunday, secondly of losing

his temper, thirdly of getting drunk, fourthly of being jealous, fifthly of telling lies, and sixthly of having made a bad confession. On examination, we shall find that either sensuality or pride is the cause of all his falls. Let us examine them in turn. (1) He missed Mass, because, finding himself lying comfortably in bed and tired after his week's work, he was *too sensual* to deny himself and to overcome his inclination to prolong his sleep. (2) Then he lost his temper, because he had *not humility* enough to bear some disparaging remarks made by his companions, and so flew into a rage. (3) He got drunk, because he could not deny himself the *sensual* pleasure which strong drink always affords him. (4) His jealousy was due to his *pride,* which could not tolerate another being preferred to himself. (5) He told lies in order to secure some dainty or to escape some unpleasantness (in which case they would come under the heading of *sensuality*), or else he told them to win the esteem of men, or to avoid the shame of being found guilty of some disgraceful act, and then they would be really an act of *pride.* Lastly, he made a bad confession, because he had not the *humility* to acknowledge openly certain loathsome faults. Thus, we might examine all sins in turn, and we shall

find that either *sensuality* or *pride* is at the root of every single one of them. Every evil a man commits, he commits either in order to satisfy his sensuality or his pride. In short, just as certain noxious germs will grow and flourish where the soil is favorable and will never develop where the soil is not suitable, so vices will easily take root and grow apace where sensuality and pride reign. On the other hand, if a man be thoroughly mortified and thoroughly humble, there is hardly any sin that has the power to lay hold of him. On examination, we shall find that every incentive to sin is a *direct appeal* to our sensuality or our pride—that is to say to our disordered love of preëminence or of pleasure.

Hence it follows that the two most valuable auxiliaries in our spiritual warfare are mortification and humility. Anyone thoroughly trained and exercised in mortification and humility will, by God's grace, be more powerful than all his enemies. Whosoever keeps himself well practised in these two virtues, and never ceases cultivating them, will prove himself a most wise and valiant general, will win victory after victory all along the line, and secure for himself the blessing of God and glory and happiness everlasting.

As every sin, when properly understood, will

be found to be a form of self-indulgence, so every sin and offense against God will be found to be a form of pride. Whenever we sin, we refuse in practice to acknowledge His authority. We will not have Him to reign over us. We consult our own pleasure or convenience, rather than the express will and command of Almighty God.

In short, as has been already said, pride and sensuality are the two great taproots, from which every offense and crime springs, and the two great obstacles to our progress in virtue.

It is because of this, I take it, that all spiritual writers lay so much stress upon the necessity of cultivating both mortification and humility for those who aspire after perfection.

Let us begin by considering their attitude towards mortification. This they regard, not only as useful and salutary, but as absolutely essential. They seem to say that all sanctity must be considered a mere pretense unless accompanied by rigorous self-denial, and that we shall have no chance whatever of attaining real holiness except under the standard of the Cross. Thus, having quoted the words of our Blessed Lord: "If any man will come after Me, *let him deny himself* and take up his cross daily" (Matt., xvi. 24), St. Alphonsus observes that

"Christian perfection *consists in self-abnegation.* So much so indeed, that whosoever denies not himself, is not and *cannot* be a follower of Christ." St. Ignatius says very much the same thing, but in different words. He writes: "The reason why so few, even of those who practise mental prayer, become saints is *because so few endeavor to overcome themselves.* Of a hundred persons devoted to prayer, more than ninety are self-willed and unmortified." These are acknowledged to be great authorities, but let us now quote a still higher authority on the spiritual life, namely, St. John of the Cross. Listen to his weighty words, and take them well to heart: "The way of God consisteth not in the multiplicity of meditations, ways of devotion, or interior sweetness, though these may be necessary for beginners, but in one necessary thing only, namely, in knowing how to *deny ourselves in earnest,* inwardly and outwardly, and in giving ourselves up to suffer for Christ's sake, and in annihilating ourselves utterly." And mark especially the following words: "If we be deficient at all in this exercise, which is the *sum and root of all virtue,* all we may do will be but beating the air (*i.e.,* utterly profitless) notwithstanding great meditations and communications. . . . That form of spirituality," he continues,

"which would travel in sweetness and at its ease, shunning the imitation of Christ, is worth nothing" (*Works,* I, 79).

Surely, these lines show that this famous ascetical writer (probably the greatest the Church possesses) attaches an importance and an efficacy to a penitential life far beyond anything we could have imagined. He assures us that no real advance in sanctity can be hoped for, until we know thoroughly how to deny ourselves in everything. I will quote one more sentence from the same volume (p. 3): "Without mortification, I say it boldly, we shall make *no progress whatever* in the knowledge of God and of ourselves, notwithstanding all our efforts."

The glorious St. Teresa evidently agreed with St. John, for she says: "It would be folly to think that God admits to His familiar friendship those who lead a life of ease."

As much is implied in the words which our Lord addressed to St. Francis: "If you desire to possess and to enjoy Me, make all bitter things sweet to you, and all sweet things bitter."

Mortifications may, of course, be either interior or exterior. "Both are necessary for perfection," says St. Alphonsus, "but with this difference, that exterior mortification should be

practised with discretion, and interior mortifications without discretion and with much fervor, for what does it profit to mortify the body, while the passions of the heart are indulged?"

In spite of its importance and positive necessity, there can be no doubt but that fallen man finds it exceedingly difficult to lead a life of mortification and self-denial. It is so entirely contrary to the instincts of his corrupt nature, which rather seeks and desires comfort, enjoyment and the gratification of all his senses, that strong motives are required to induce him to brace himself up for the task.

We will conclude by suggesting some of the most powerful of these motives.

Our *first* requirement is a strong and personal love of our crucified Saviour. "He who loves," observes St. Augustine, *"thinks nothing hard,* whereas the least labor or cross is insupportable to him who loves not."

Our *second* requirement is an abiding memory of the terrible sufferings and bitter Passion of Christ, our model and example. "Christ suffered for us, leaving us an example, that we should *follow in His footsteps."* His divine example will be a spur to our weak and sluggish wills and will make us ashamed of our sensuality and effeminacy in refusing to walk along the

way of the Cross in the blood-stained footprints of our divine Master.

Our *third* requirement is a sorrowful consciousness of our many personal sins and imperfections, which need expiation, and which indeed must be atoned for either here or hereafter. "Amen, Amen, I say unto thee. Thou shalt not go from thence, till thou pay the last farthing" (Matt., v. 26).

Our *fourth* requirement is a thorough appreciation of the enormous spiritual value of even the least act of self-denial, undertaken through the love of God, for every such act secures for us an increase of actual grace here, and a claim to a corresponding increase of eternal glory hereafter.

Our *fifth* requirement is a full recognition of the eternal weight of celestial glory purchased by such acts. "I reckon that the sufferings of this time are *not worthy to be compared* with the glory to come" (Rom., viii. 18). "If," declares St. John of the Cross, "you will deny yourselves one joy in the things of sense, our Lord will repay you a hundredfold in this life, both spiritually and temporally" (*Works,* II, 379).

Our *sixth* requirement is the vivid remembrance that mortification is the path that leads

directly to our Father's home, for "through many tribulations we must enter into the Kingdom of God."

When we consider the paramount importance of humility and of mortification as aids to perfection, we shall be in no way surprised to learn that they are precisely the two virtues most conspicuously manifested in our Lord's life. Jesus Christ is the great example for every man, and every one aiming at sanctity must take Him as his highest model. But, if this be true of all without exception, it is far truer of priests than of others. A priest has to clothe himself with the very spirit of Christ; he has to represent Christ, to take His place, and to continue the ministry of Christ. In a word, a priest and a priest only must so live and labor that he may really deserve to be regarded as and to be called an *"alter Christus."*

Hence it follows that a priest is more solemnly bound to "learn of Him" and to walk in His footsteps than any other person whatsoever. For this reason, we will devote our next two chapters to a consideration, first, of Christ as the model of *humility,* and, secondly, of Christ as the model of *mortification.*

CHAPTER XVII

JESUS CHRIST, OUR MODEL OF HUMILITY

"Learn of Me because I am meek and humble of heart" (Matt., xi. 29).

ST. TERESA once asked our Lord why, of all the virtues, He loved humility best. "Because," He replied, "I am the Truth."

When theologians tell us that Almighty God possesses all virtues, and possesses them in an absolutely infinite degree, they mean of course all virtues consonant with His divine nature; for there are certain qualities of mind in man, which are recognized as virtues *in him,* but which would be essentially out of place *in God;* the chief among these is humility.

To speak of God, considered in His own divine nature and essence, as "humble," is meaningless. For what is humility? It may be defined as the practical recognition of our own limitations. But God is without any limitation whatsoever. Again, humility is also defined to be the practical recognition of our utter depend-

ence upon another, not merely for life, and thought, and movement, but for all else, even for our very existence. But God is the supremely independent Being, who stands in need of no one, and is the sole source of His own life and happiness.

Thus, it is quite evident (if we accept these definitions just given) that humility is not a divine but a human attribute—a virtue indeed in a *creature,* but wholly incompatible with the very idea of the Infinite *Creator.*

But God's love of sinful man was so measureless and unspeakable that He resolved to share man's nature, and to become like unto us in all that is not sin; primarily, no doubt, to redeem us and to die that we might live, but also that He might set before us a living and concrete example of all the virtues that should adorn a human being, but more especially of those most necessary for us.

As God, He could never be a suitable model, for the distance between the divine and the human is too immense. But, by becoming man, He at once placed Himself more within our reach, and was able to offer us the most admirable and the most perfect example conceivable. He commands us to learn of Him: "Learn of me. . . . 'I am the way, the truth,

and the life'" (John, xiv. 6). But, if He manifested in His own Person every conceivable virtue, there was one which seems to shine forth with a greater brilliance and a more constant light than any other, and that is humility. It is that virtue, indeed, over and above every other, that rivets the attention and excites the wonder of every attentive student of His earthly career. All other virtues, powers and excellences seem perfectly natural and fitting in a God Incarnate. Thus, we are not astonished, for instance, when we see Him confounding the Pharisees when they thought to "catch Him in His words," nor when we hear Him speaking "with authority" and as no one had ever yet spoken; nor does it astound us when He changes water into wine, or stills the tempest, or even calls the dead back to life, or raises Himself triumphantly from the tomb. No! All these acts do but serve to remind us that we are dealing with One who is as truly God as He is truly man, moving in the midst of His own creation.

What does, however, excite our wonder is His extraordinary humility. What almost puzzles and bewilders us is to see Him, who is the equal of the Father and the figure of His substance, lowering Himself to the very dust and submitting to be treated as an outcast and

a criminal. We stand amazed as we behold Omnipotence flying away through the Egyptian desert as a weak and defenseless babe from the face of Herod, as though unable to protect Himself from the enmity of an angry man who sought to take His life; or when we see Him submitting to the painful ceremony of circumcision, as though He were an ordinary sinner like ourselves. And, at each step in His wondrous career, our astonishment grows stronger till we find ourselves asking: Can this be the eternal Lord of Glory, who so demeans and humbles Himself before His own creatures? What! is it possible that He who is the Creator and Lord of all, has not whereon to lay His head? That He who feeds the very birds of the air, and the beasts of the field, sits hungry and thirsty beside the well? That He who clothes the trees of the forests and the lilies of the field, so that Solomon in all his glory was not their equal, is nevertheless stripped of His garments? That He who is infinite holiness and purity is condemned as a shameless criminal to a most ignominious death? Oh, consider Him as He bends His sacred head to receive the crown of thorns, and bares His back to be torn open by the scourge! Nor is even this enough to satisfy His thirst for humiliations. He wills

to be numbered among thieves and murderers, and to be flung naked on the hard bed of the Cross; He stretches out His hands and His feet to the executioners, and allows His bitterest enemies to triumph over Him, as He writhes in agony, while the nails are driven through muscle and nerve and quivering flesh into the fatal tree.

O! the ignominy of it! O! the degradation and the shame! Why, O Lord, why such profound, such measureless yet voluntary humiliation? There is but one answer: *because of man's pride*—because He who sees all things saw that pride had been the source of all sin and all transgression, the one chief cause of every misfortune. As there is no height so exalted to which pride will not aspire, so there was no depth of humiliation so profound to which Christ did not descend.

He remembered how He had created the angels, clothed them with every beauty and grace, and endowed them with gifts beyond compare, and yet pride had been their ruin. Not content with their unparalleled privileges, they aspired to be equal to God Himself, and said in their hearts: "I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God, I will sit in the mountain of the covenant, in

the sides of the north. I will ascend above the height of the clouds, I will be like the most High" (Is., xiv. 13, 14). But such pride was but the prelude to a ghastly fall. "How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, who didst rise in the morning? . . . Thou shalt be brought down to hell, into the depth of the pit" (Is., xiv. 12, 15).

And as pride transformed angels into devils, and converted their heaven into hell, so pride brought eternal death upon Adam and all his descendants. For, after the fall of Lucifer and his companions, God created another race, "a little lower than the angels." They were of an inferior order of being, with less beauty and fewer gifts to foment the spirit of pride. Yet, in spite of their humbler extraction, and though their souls had been, as it were, weighted with bodies formed from the dust to keep them lowly, yet even these yielded to the same insidious foe. The devil instilled into their hearts the poison of a secret ambition. He stirred up within them a longing to be something more than what God had made them, and inoculated them with his own virus, till at last they also yielded to the promptings of pride. He promised them that, if they would but rebel against

God, they too would become gods; that, if they would but break away from their allegiance, disobey the command imposed upon them, and eat the forbidden fruit, every desire of their hearts would be satisfied. "You shall not die," but, on the contrary, "in what day soever you shall eat of the fruit, your eyes shall be opened, and you shall be as Gods, knowing good and evil" (Gen., iii. 4, 5). They willingly listened to the seducer's lies; and, as he spoke, they felt the evil flames of passion stirring within their hearts, and, in spite of God's solemn command, they sought to force His hand and to seize by an act of disobedience the pleasures and the honors He had denied them.

As the angels and our first parents brought down God's curse upon themselves by their pride, so does *every* sinner incur His righteous indignation in the selfsame way. If we can but slay pride and expel it wholly and entirely from our hearts, we shall have slain a thousand-headed hydra which is capable of bringing down upon us every conceivable disaster and misfortune. Pride is a fire that consumes what is richest and most precious; it is a flood that carries off at one fell swoop the treasures of a lifetime; it is a rust that eats away even the most

tried and firmest virtue, a poison that scatters disease and death where once health and life and beauty reigned supreme.

Every sin contains within it the element of pride. However varied the character or the species of our offenses, they all bear upon them this special mark of the beast. No one can ever be guilty before God or incur His anger without having first, in word or in deed or at least in thought, cried out with the fiend: *"Non serviam!* I will not serve! I will not obey!"

As pride is the very texture from which every sin is woven and made up, so on the other hand humility is the underlying principle and the constituent element of every virtue.

This may easily be realized by any one who gives the matter his careful consideration. Let us take a few of the principal virtues as specimens of the rest. Consider the virtue of faith, that virtue "without which it is impossible to please God" (Heb., xi. 6), and which has received so many eulogies in the Holy Scripture. What after all is faith but *a form of humility?* It is the bowing down of our proud reason—the forcing of it to renounce its own personal judgments and to accept the teaching of God. To believe—especially, when what is proposed to us is a mystery beyond the powers of our in-

tellect to fathom—is to throw our reason prostrate on its face before the infinite and immutable truth of God, and to compel it to cry with heart and soul: "I am blind and ignorant and foolish. But one thing I know, and that is that Thou art the Omniscient and the Eternal Truth, and that, though heaven and earth should pass away, Thy words shall never pass away. CREDO! I believe!" On the other hand, all apostasy from the Church, all heresy and schism, is the direct result of pride. The notorious heresiarchs of every age are born from and nurtured upon pride and self-importance and vanity. St. Gregory Nazianzen calls them "the soldiers and satellites of the devil," and most justly, for pride is the common parent of them all: "The mother of all heretics," says St. Augustine (*De Genesi ad Litteram,* cap. xxv.), "is pride, the lust for glory and the desire of knowledge."

Or take the virtue of hope. On careful examination that too will be found to be but *a form of humility*. To hope is to trust in God, to confide in His mercy, to lean upon Him for everything. But who does this ? Is it the proud and self-sufficient? Is it he who glories in his own strength, and who boasts of his own gifts? No. He alone exercises true and perfect hope

who has learned his own weakness, who is conscious of his many infirmities, and who has *altogether given up hoping in himself!* Pride desires to walk alone. Pride acknowledges no weakness. It spurns all offers of assistance. It is too wise to learn, too strong to need an external support; it will not ask for help, but places all trust in itself, and leans on a broken reed. True hope is but *a form of humility.*

Another virtue, and one upon which our Lord lays great stress, is fraternal charity. Indeed He selects it as the mark by which He would have all His true disciples known. "By this, let all men know that you are My disciples, that you have love one for another" (John, xiii. 35). St. John declares that, if we love not our brethren, we cannot be said even to love God. "If any man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar. For he that hateth his brother whom he seeth, how can he love God, whom he seeth not?" (I John, iv. 20.) Therefore "love one another with brotherly love, in honor preventing one another" (Rom., xii. 10).

Now who are they who carry out this beautiful law of fraternal charity? Surely it is only those who have made some progress in humility. To love my brother means to consider his interests, to consult his feelings, to pity his weak-

ness, to desire his happiness and his welfare, and to do what I can to promote it. It is to be ready to yield to him, to let him take precedence, and to content myself with a lower place. It is to be more anxious to give pleasure than to receive it, or rather to find one's happiness in conferring happiness on others. It is to efface self, and to think of others and their needs and their necessities. Where will such sentiments as these grow and flourish but in a lowly and humble heart? Where there is humility, there also are peace and charity. Where all are ready to take the last place and to bear the most menial burdens, there is no bitterness, no strife, no contention. It is only pride that introduces trouble and breaks through the golden chains of concord and unity. Where men are arrogant and stand upon their rights, are exacting and touchy and ready to take offense, and will not waive a point nor yield a hair's breadth of what they consider their due, there true fraternal charity languishes and dies. It can no more live in such an atmosphere than the turtle dove can live amid the ceaseless storms and tempest of a restless and an angry sea. No. The love of one another enjoined by our divine Lord is very closely linked with humility of heart.

Consider yet another virtue—perhaps one of the most important—namely, obedience. As Christ was "obedient even unto death," so does He desire us to obey. "Let every soul," says St. Paul, "be subject to higher powers; for there is no power but from God; and those that are, are ordained of God. Therefore, he that resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God" (Rom., xiii. 1, 2). St. Peter, likewise, when writing to the faithful from Rome, says: "Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also the froward" (I Peter, ii. 18). In fact, there are few duties so incumbent upon us as obedience. But here again, we may ask, what is obedience? In sober truth, obedience is nothing but *another form of humility*. As faith is the humility of the intellect, so obedience is the humility of the will. My will, if left to itself, would carry me hither or thither, and I restrain it. It would break through the barriers imposed by Almighty God, and I beat it back, thwart its desires, and humble it. I keep it down and refuse to gratify its wayward appetites. Or, to express the same truth in other terms, *when I obey, I practise humility*.

It would occupy too long to illustrate still further how every virtue without exception has

its roots in humility, and how very far, in consequence, he has advanced who has found this exhaustless treasure. But humility does even more than give rise to innumerable virtues. It leads us also instinctively to adopt those important rules and pious practices that are so earnestly recommended by spiritual writers. Take such duties as, first, that of avoiding temptation and all occasions of sin, and secondly, the duty of prayer. Both of these are of the utmost importance to any one who wishes to save his soul; both are commanded us by God Himself who says: "He that loveth danger shall perish in it" (Ecclus., iii. 27); "If thy right eye scandalize thee, pluck it out" (Matt., v. 29); "Pray always" (Luke, xviii. 1); "Cry to Me, and I will hear thee" (Jer., xxxiii. 3); "Ask and it shall be given you" (Matt., vii. 7).

The humble man experiences no difficulty in performing either of these duties. His natural instinct will teach him to keep out of harm's way as best he can. In fact, one of the effects of humility is to fill him with a great distrust of himself. He is intimately acquainted with the weakness and fickleness of the human heart, especially in the presence of temptation. He will not dare expose himself unnecessarily to danger either at home or abroad, but will pro-

tect the burning flame of his innocence and guard it from the fierce winds of temptation, as a traveler protects his lamp on a tempestuous night.

It is quite otherwise with the proud man. He holds himself invulnerable, laughs at danger, and will "rush in where angels fear to tread." In short, he is an exception. The proud always are! He can touch pitch without being defiled, and can play with fire without getting burned, for (like the Pharisee) he is not like the rest of men. If books are full of subtle sophisms and specious arguments against divine truths, they may be dangerous for some dull and impressionable readers, but not of course for him. He flatters himself that he is far too clever to be deluded, too strong to be overcome, too much of a match even for the devil himself to fall into the trap spread out to catch his feet. So, blinded by his pride, he prepares his own destruction. He digs the pit, and straightway falls into it (cfr. Prov., xxvi. 27).

And, as the proud man feels that there is little need to avoid the occasions of sin, so he never sufficiently realizes the importance and necessity of prayer. For what is prayer? It is the cry of a soul in distress. It is the language of the heart under the pressure of cares

and dangers that it feels it cannot of itself overcome or drive off. It is an expression of trust in another by *one who has ceased altogether to trust in himself*. We must actually realize our great need and know our misery before our hearts will conceive or our lips will form those burning words which rise straight up to the throne of mercy. Or, what comes to the same thing, *it needs true humility* to produce a prayer whose earnestness, sincerity, and confident longings will pierce the very ear of God and bring down the sustaining showers of His grace. "The prayer of him that humbleth himself shall pierce the clouds, and he will not depart till the Most High behold" (Ecclus., xxxv. 21). God resists the proud, but giveth grace to the humble.

Oh, how necessary is this noble virtue, and how every highest and best thing seems to shelter under its protecting wings! It is a soil out of which all blessings, all graces and all spiritual excellences spring up as flowers and fruits out of the blessed soil of some unearthly paradise. Surely, we should earnestly strive to possess ourselves of such a treasure, even though it may cost us years of toil and labor, for it will procure us all we most desire.

It was this virtue which, more than any other,

called down the love of God upon the Immaculate Virgin, and merited for her the unparalleled dignity of becoming the Mother of God. It was because "He regarded the humility of His handmaid" that we behold all generations thenceforth calling her blessed. Oh, admirable mystery—a virgin of all others most exalted, and excelling even the Cherubim and Seraphim in dignity, and at the same time the most humble and lowly of all!

"What," asks St. Bernard, "must be the value of humility, when the King of All Glory reduced Himself so low, both in His Incarnation and in His Passion, in order to inculcate the practice of this virtue, without which the aggregate of all other virtues would tend only to our greater ruin! He who did no sin, who is Holiness and Justice, who hath on His garments and thigh written: King of Kings and Lord of Lords, to whom all power is given in heaven and on earth, the supreme Judge of the living and the dead at whose name every knee bends in heaven, on earth and in hell—He it is who, *in order to teach us humility,* came down from heaven and became the last of men and the outcast of the people (*novissimus virorum, abjectio plebis*)."

Who then can wonder that pride is most hate-

ful in God's eyes, or that He should cast from Him all who are contaminated by it? The Apostle St. James declares in inspired words that "God resisteth the proud" (iv. 6). Note well the force of the expression. He does not say that God attacks or assails the proud—as though God were, in the first instance, the aggressor—but he says that God simply resists them, by which we are to understand that it is the proud, who (necessarily and in virtue of their pride) attack and rise up against God. They would rob Him of His honor, they deny His sovereignty, they arrogate to themselves what belongs to Him, and refuse to acknowledge their absolute and utter dependence on and indebtedness to Him for everything; so that, when God drives them from Him and condemns them to condign punishment, He is really only, as it were, acting on the defensive, and as one obliged to safeguard Himself from unjust aggressors who have deliberately provoked and challenged the attack.

We priests, above all, should learn this virtue which Christ is at such pains to teach. We beyond all others should study and familiarize ourselves with such a unique and incomparable model, and strive with all earnestness to imitate it. "Strive with all your heart after humility,"

says St. John of the Cross, "in thought, word and deed, taking more pleasure in others than in yourself, and this too with all your power and from a sincere heart. In this way you will overcome evil with good, drive the devil away, and have joy in your heart. Labor to do this with respect to those who are less agreeable to you; for, be assured, if you do not, you will never have true charity, nor make progress in it. Be always more ready to receive instruction than to give it to the least of your brethren" (*Works,* ed. 1864, II, 312). "The depth of our misery is so great," observes Père Grou, "that we could not possibly bear the full sight of it; and, if God were to allow us to see it as it is, when we *begin* to give ourselves to Him, the sight would drive us to despair: therefore, He shows it to us only by degrees and with a reserve that is full of wisdom. But, as this knowledge of our true selves is absolutely necessary for us to make us humble, watchful, and full of distrust of our own strength and full of confidence in God, by degrees and gradually, *as we grow stronger and advance in virtue,* God will show us our natural corruption and our weakness" ("Manual for Interior Souls," p. 106).

The humble man "should always prefer

everyone to himself. . . . He should consider that, if the most wicked criminals had received as much grace from God as he has, they would live far better than he does. He must not desire to have any name or reputation, or to be praised or to be considered humble or holy. He should prefer to lie hidden rather than to be known, to be subject rather than to be in authority, to be taught rather than to teach others. The lowest place should satisfy him. He should not be ashamed of outward humiliation, neither ought he *in his own mind* to make much of his own exercises, preferring them to those of others. The more he may feel himself to have advanced, and the greater the gifts he has received from God, so much the more lowly and despicable should he become in his own eyes. For, if he considers himself to be something, he is still a very long way off from God" (Blosius, "Mirror for Monks," p. 22).

CHAPTER XVIII

JESUS CHRIST, OUR MODEL OF MORTIFICATION

"Master, I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou shalt go" (Matt., viii. 19).

AS our Blessed Lord taught us by His example the great lesson of humility, so did He teach us the equally necessary lesson of mortification. If no one ever humbled himself so profoundly as the Only-Begotten Son of God, so no one ever practised such severe and such continuous self-abnegation. St. Paul says: "Christ pleased not Himself" (Rom., xv. 3). From the cradle to the grave, His entire life was one continual martyrdom, so that the Scriptures describe Him as "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with infirmity" (Is., liii. 3). "He bore our infirmities and carried our sorrows" to such an extreme degree that "we have thought Him as it were a leper, and as one struck by God and afflicted. He was wounded for our iniquities, He was bruised for our sins"

—and this through no mere accident or force of circumstances, but because of His own deliberate and free choice. "He was offered because it was His own will, and He opened not His mouth," but suffered Himself to be "led as a sheep to the slaughter" (Is., liii. 7). When but eight days old, He shed His blood in His circumcision, and He continued from that day practising penance more and more severely, until at last He was stretched in excruciating agony, naked and helpless upon the infamous gibbet of the Cross.

We are the members of that thorn-crowned Head, so let us bear in mind that, if He suffered so severely, it was in order "to leave us an example, *that we might follow in His footsteps*" (I Peter, ii. 21).

Now, it should be noted that it formed no part of God's *original* design that man should practise penance. Pain is recognized as an evil in the natural order, and it is one which we have brought upon ourselves. God's intention in creating man was that he should be perfectly happy and contented, and wholly unacquainted with sorrow and suffering. He formed him at the beginning innocent and joyous. He even surrounded him with all that could give him pleasure, could administer to his needs, and

could promote his wellbeing. And, had man only remained faithful and obedient, he *never* would have experienced either agony or grief. On the contrary, his years on earth would have passed in peace and pleasure, and would have been followed, not by a painful death, but by a painless translation to a state of eternal and supernatural felicity and blessedness in heaven. Such is the infinite goodness of God.

But, as the Psalmist reminds us, "when man was in honor, he did not understand, but became like the senseless beasts" (Ps., xlviii. 13). He failed to realize his high dignity and exalted privileges, and, closing his ears to the voice of conscience and to the commands of God, he listened to the seducer, and at his suggestion and advice rebelled against his Sovereign Lord, and refused to submit to His authority. What was the consequence? Sin, once committed, produced forthwith disorder and dire confusion within his own being, and without him as well as within. The soul and body were created in the first instance for one another, and perfect harmony reigned between them. But sin disturbed this reign of peace, and tore them asunder by introducing conflicting interests, leaving each striving and struggling for the mastery.

Originally, the body, with all its senses and

organs and cravings, was in complete subjection to the soul, which ruled and governed this wondrous microcosm with undisputed authority. Now this order no longer obtains. The body has grown rebellious. It is constantly disputing the rights of the soul, usurping its authority, and striving to dethrone it. It craves for sensual delights, for fleshly satisfactions, for comforts and gratifications, and for the material riches that may secure them. The soul is ever on the defensive; it is obliged to fight for its very life, and to put forth all its strength and power to escape being dragged down and trampled into the mire and filth of sin.

It is a hard and stubborn battle, and goes on with varying results till the night of death closes over the field, and puts an end to the conflict. "Man shall go forth to his work and to his labor *until the evening*" (Ps., ciii. 23). Not a day passes but some blow is struck, and some wound is inflicted. Our impulses and attractions are all on the wrong side. Our natural tendencies are towards sloth, towards pleasure, towards neglect of religion, and towards love of the world, rather than towards the love of God.

Calculate the years of our brief life that have already flowed by into eternity, and the manner in which we have misspent them. How seldom

we have taken the higher line, and how often we have taken the lower; how repeatedly we have followed nature, and how rarely we have corresponded with grace: what negligences, what omissions, and what injustices have marked our career! And as day follows day till they form into months and years, so our offenses also mount up. And each backward step and each venial fault, however slight and unnoticed, has its own separate and definite penalty. How terrifying to contemplate this ever-growing list of sins and infidelities, with its ever-accompanying list of punishments! As a spendthrift becomes oppressed by an ever-growing weight of debt till at last he no longer knows how to meet it, and would need another life in which to wipe it off, so are we continually laying up for ourselves a longer and severer punishment.

Time hurries us on, so that our childhood, our boyhood, our adolescence pass unheeded, and are soon lost to view; and we easily forget the thoughts and words and deeds that have stained and besmirched the beauty of our souls during those memorable years. But, if *we* have forgotten them, they are still clearly inscribed in the memory of God, and will one day be brought in evidence against us. Yea, the whole

history of our life with all its treasons and defects and frailties, with its disorderly acts and reprehensible thoughts and uncontrolled desires, will be spread out as a map before us, when we come to stand for judgment before "the great white throne" (Apoc., xx. 11).

The guilt of these sins, if we have been truly contrite, will of course have been blotted out: but much of the punishment remains. Yes, even though heaven be our home finally, we shall yet not actually taste of its joy nor enter into possession of its privileges till the claims of God's justice have been fully satisfied, and till every sin has been completely atoned for. The door of our prison will not yield to our pressure till we have discharged every fraction of the debt. "Amen, I say to you, you shall not go out from thence until you have paid the uttermost farthing" (Matt., v. 26).

The saints of God, even those who worked miracles and led lives of extreme penance, seem to the eyes of men to be without sin and almost immaculate, yet even they in reality had a large account to settle, since even "the just man shall fall seven times, though he shall rise again" (Prov., xxiv. 16), and no saint, however exalted in virtue, except the Ever-Blessed Virgin, lived altogether free from imperfections.

But then, if they often fell through frailty or surprise, they were continually settling their accounts and wiping out their debts by repeated mortifications and severe penances. With them every day was a day of self-denial. But we? What are we doing in this way? What efforts are we making to satisfy the claims of divine justice? We, whose sins are so much more numerous, so much more serious, so much more deliberate! Alas! we accomplish little, and scarcely even realize the gravity of the situation.

The law of penance is a divine law, and no one can evade it. Since "all have sinned," as St. Paul says (Rom., iii. 23), so all must atone for sin. Since all are included among transgressors, so all are included under the law of penance. There may be some too delicate or too infirm to undertake the particular forms of penance enjoined by the Church. These may apply for a dispensation, but, even when it is granted, that does not release them from the general obligation which rests upon every sinner in virtue of his being a sinner. Should any person wish to exempt himself from all penance, *let him first prove himself free from all guilt.* When such a blameless soul, such a heroic saint, arises amongst us, it will be time enough to con-

sider his case. As for ourselves, we know that we must "take up our cross and follow Christ daily," if we expect ever to attain to His kingdom.

But the supreme importance of penance is really not so much to atone for past sin as to arm ourselves against sin in the future, and that is the point that I have now most in mind. Let us then remember that, though penance atones for sin and appeases the anger of God, it has also another far-reaching effect: and that is to strengthen us against temptation. It imparts a vigor and a certain spiritual robustness and energy to the soul, which goes far to ensure victory in the future. It braces up the will, and instils habits of self-conquest which are of inestimable service in our warfare with the devil, the world and the flesh.

We shall realize this better perhaps, if we pause a moment to consider, firstly, what sin is, and, secondly, the security that a mortified life give us against every assault.

As we have already said, sin is the only enemy we have to fear. This becomes clear so soon as we ask ourselves what is that which alone can blast our whole career, rob us of God, deprive us of heaven, and hurl us headlong into the abyss? There is but one thing, and that is

sin. Yes, no other adversary can accomplish any of these things. But sin can do it, and is doing it every day in thousands of cases. It is the source of all our misfortune and of all our misery.

But what is sin? What precisely is its nature? From what soil does it spring? Of what is it born? It is born of an inordinate self-love. It springs from a spirit of self-indulgence. *It can thrive in no other atmosphere.* And how is it connected with penance and mortification? It is their opposite, their inveterate enemy. One is the very antithesis of the other. An act of sin is an act of self-indulgence. And an act of penance? Well, an act of penance is just the opposite to an act of self-indulgence: it is an act of self-conquest. We sin. What has happened? Our evil inclination has conquered us. On the other hand, we do penance. Again, I ask, what has happened? We have conquered our evil inclination. When we sin, our enemy throws us under his feet, and places his heel, as it were, upon our head and, trampling upon our prostrate form, crushes us to the dust. When, on the contrary, we do penance, we throw our enemy, and, instead of him placing his heel upon us, it is we who place our foot

upon him, and vanquish him thoroughly. Thus we see how one is opposed to the other.

From this it follows that to practise penance is to fit and dispose ourselves for continual victories. We cannot help being tempted, for we are in the world for the express purpose of being tried, but we can prevent ourselves from being seduced and overcome.

Men who fall, fall because they have not the courage to prepare and dispose themselves for the conflict by acquiring a habit of self-denial even in the lawful things. From this point of view, how much wiser are the children of this world than the children of the light! We never expect a soldier to expose himself to the enemy in the open field, until after he has been carefully drilled and exercised and has acquired some dexterity in the use of arms. Indeed, no man, be he a boxer, wrestler, a swordsman, a swimmer or a runner, attempts to exhibit his strength and prowess in a public contest except after a prolonged period of preparation. He is well aware that it would be foolish for him to expect to succeed without previous practice and training.

Now, if this be deemed so essential in ordinary encounters in the arena or on the race-

track, where no issue of grave importance is at stake, how much more essential must it be when the consequences of success or of failure are so vital, and so bound up with our eternal interests? To our shame be it said, worldlings deny themselves and put themselves to endless trouble and pain for purely earthly considerations, while we will do hardly anything even for the kingdom of heaven. Yet they are contending for a temporal prize, and we for an eternal one.

Take two persons of similar age and profession and character, but differing in their spiritual training, and then note how differently they are affected by temptation. The one—let us suppose—has always followed his own inclination. His ruling idea has always been to amuse and enjoy himself. He has gone on the plan of indulging every inclination to the full in all that is not actual sin. Suddenly, he is brought face to face with some severe temptation. The devil incites him to enjoy some *forbidden* pleasure. He knows it is contrary to the law of God. He even realizes that heaven or hell will be his portion, according as he acts. But the pleasure is so enticing, and he has never yet denied himself anything. Then how can he begin now? Habit is said to be a second

nature. He has for years past been forming and establishing a habit. But alas! it is a habit of self-indulgence. How is he to escape from the tyranny of this habit now: how break the iron bonds which he has been forging year after year? Not only are the devil and the world and the flesh fighting against him, but his own nature conspires with them to encompass his downfall, and to secure his ruin—that effeminate nature that has been trained to yield to pleasure and to study its ease on every occasion, and never to forego any opportunity of enjoyment.

What difficulties such a one will experience! What hope can we entertain of his ultimate victory? Alas! there seems to be but little.

Now, how totally different is the position of the individual who has studied in the school of suffering, and has learned by long and patient practice the art of self-conquest; yea, who, perhaps, has by the grace of God never allowed a day to go by without undertaking some act of mortification and penance. Such a one has his passions well under control. He has often denied them and thwarted them in things innocent and lawful, so that now they have become as subject to his direction and as obedient to his will as a thoroughly well-trained horse to every

movement of its rider. The pleasure is set before him, as it is set before the other, in the most alluring and attractive form, and everything conspires to invite him to indulge himself. True, but remember he is no novice in the art of resistance. He has so often turned away from lawful pleasures, and so constantly renounced joys that were innocent and pure, that now, when asked to barter his soul and to sell his God for gold or lust, he finds no difficulty in bidding the tempter begone! He who refuses delights, when they may be lawfully indulged, is not likely to indulge in those which carry with them such most appalling consequences as the enmity of God and the sentence of eternal death.

The life of every Christian should be marked within and without by the Sign of the Cross. "They who are Christ's have crucified their flesh with its vices and concupiscences" (Gal., v. 24). The habit of mortification creates a certain *stream of tendency* which is of the utmost importance in our spiritual warfare. Everyone knows what a difference it makes to even a strong swimmer, whether he is swimming with the stream, or whether he is heading against it. In the first case, his advance is easy, rapid, delightful, and he moves without any

serious exertion. In the second case, he has to struggle and exert himself to the utmost, and yet makes very little progress in spite of all his efforts. If he pauses for a moment to take breath, he is immediately carried down by the current. Or compare two cyclists, one riding against the wind and the other in the direction of the wind. The first can scarcely force his way, even though he puts forth all his strength, and he tires himself out before he has covered even a moderate distance; but the second seems to fly along like a bird, and skims over the ground with the utmost grace and ease.

So is it in the spiritual world. If our whole life is set in the direction of mortification, if pain and self-denial become the characteristic and habit of our conduct, if we embrace the Cross lovingly in union with our divine Master, then we may indeed be said to *create a stream of tendency* which will be of inestimable service to us in our warfare with all the enemies of our salvation. This stream of tendency will be to us what the swift current is to the swimmer who is following its direction, and what the favorable wind is to the cyclist who is riding towards the same point of the compass. If, on the contrary, we are habitually soft, flaccid, and easy led, if we let nature and inclination

have their own way and seldom or never repress our appetites in lawful things, then, when the hour of trial comes upon us, we shall be like a swimmer laboring and toiling with much difficulty and with very doubtful result against a powerful and turgid stream. "Be zealous then and do penance" (Apoc., iii.19). "Gird yourselves," says the Prophet Jeremias, "with haircloth, lament and cry, for the anger of the Lord is not turned away from us" (iv. 8). Like the great Apostle St. Paul, we should be able to say: "I chastize my body, and bring it under subjection" (I Cor., ix. 27). "Till we can, in a certain sense, detach ourselves from our bodies," writes Cardinal Newman, "our minds will not be in a state to receive divine impressions and to exert heavenly aspirations. A smooth and easy life, an uninterrupted enjoyment of the goods of Providence, full meals, soft raiment, well-furnished homes, the pleasure of sense, the feeling of security, the consciousness of wealth, these and the like, if we are not careful, choke up all the avenues of the soul, through which the light and breath of heaven might come to us. . . . We must, at least at seasons, defraud ourselves of nature, if we would not be defrauded of grace" ("Parochial and Plain Sermons," p. 129).

In conclusion, let us remember that the two most essential and vital virtues we have to practise are humility and mortification. No other virtues are so clearly and so conspicuously manifested in the life of our Blessed Lord, or so discernible and apparent in His whole manner and conduct. And, the more we ourselves grow in humility and mortification, not merely the more shall we resemble Jesus Christ Himself, but the more secure shall we become, and the more capable of resisting and overcoming every danger and every temptation.

He who is truly humble and mortified, offers no weak point in his armor for the enemy to break through. If there be no pride nor sensuality within our soul, we shall harbor no traitor to betray us into the hands of those who seek our ruin, and we shall be strong and safe amid even the stormiest sea of temptation. To secure innocence of life and freedom from sin, we must, above all things, be *humble* and *mortified.*

CHAPTER XIX

A MIRROR FOR PRIESTS: THE LIVES OF THE SAINTS

"You are fellow-citizens with the saints" (Eph., ii. 19).

ANY priest who is regular and conscientious in reciting the Divine Office, in making his morning meditation, and in offering up the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, is pretty sure to lead a good life and to keep from all deliberate sin. But if he aims, *as he certainly should,* at yet greater perfection, he should resolve also to devote some time each day to spiritual reading, more especially the lives of the saints. The reason for this is easily shown. Indeed, it is a piece of advice such as is given in all similar cases where complete and real success is sought. Thus, for instance, if a man is determined to acquire an accurate and masterly knowledge of a foreign tongue, and is bent on speaking it with ease and correctness, he will be strongly advised to go to the country where that language

is spoken, to live and move among the natives, and in that way to familiarize himself with their pronunciation and accent and mode of speech. By such means he will be able to pick up the correct idioms and the colloquial expressions with very little trouble, and indeed almost unconsciously.

It is the same in the spiritual life. In order to gain an accurate and masterly knowledge of Christian perfection, and in order to learn "the secret of the saints," we must live amongst them (by reading their lives), and familiarize ourselves with their heroic deeds, their spotless purity, their intense generosity, their unworldly spirit, and in short with their Godlike estimate both of men and of things.

We may, of course, learn much from our books of theology and of spiritual instruction, but, as personal example is infinitely more attractive and alluring than cold precept, we shall do well to keep before us the most striking and living examples. Now, it is precisely in the lives of the saints that we are enabled to see how theory is reduced to practice, for there, if anywhere, we view sanctity, no longer in the abstract, but very much in the concrete.

On all sides it is readily admitted that a lesson or a warning or an admonition that is set

before us in the form of a story or a fable, will make a far deeper impression than if presented in any other way. Thus, although we may learn much of our Lord's love and tenderness from His express declarations of it, yet how very much more vividly does His fatherly compassion and pity shine forth, and how much more deeply are we stirred, when we contemplate them in the concrete, such as in the Parable —let us say—of the Prodigal Son, where we behold, as it were with our very eyes, all the solicitude, affection and exquisite sweetness with which the broken-hearted father falls upon the neck of his unworthy but penitent son, and, pressing him to his bosom, welcomes him back with every proof of thankfulness and delight. Much the same may be said of the beautiful Parables of the Lost Sheep, the Good Samaritan, the Faithful Steward and the Neglectful Servant, and indeed in varying measure of them all.

Such speaking examples find their way directly to our hearts. They bring abstruse truths more thoroughly home to us, and enable us to grasp their significance as nothing else can. The moral is drawn without effort and applied without difficulty, while the memory of it lingers in the mind long after the dry principle that it

illustrates and embodies has been forgotten. These are but illustrations of what spiritual reading does for us in our attempts to advance along the rugged road of perfection. We may, of course, study learned treatises of ascetical theology; we may know the theory of sanctity at our finger-ends, but such knowledge will never affect us as does the contemplation of it when reduced to practice, and *exhibited in the actual life* of some great servant of God. To lay down the broad principles of holiness is one thing, but to see these principles carried out and acted upon in real life is something far more inspiring. To know what is just, and right, and loyal, and generous is no doubt important, but such knowledge does not stir us like the concrete example of some fervent soul whom we can actually watch, step by step, battling with evil in many a hand-to-hand encounter, and struggling and striving to keep his foothold on the narrow path of strict virtue amid the fiercest winds and storms of temptation. His very difficulties appeal to us; his falls and his occasional weaknesses reveal his character as well as the difficulties of the way; his courage and determination to surmount them at any cost, his stern refusal to allow obstacles or even the most serious disasters to discourage or to check him in

his onward course, infuse fresh courage and hope even into ourselves.

We feel refreshed and braced up by such a splendid manifestation of fervor, while our enthusiasm is enkindled by the conviction (till now, perhaps, but half understood) that God really is ever ready and anxious to assist those who put their trust in Him, and that He will enable them to ride triumphantly over the most formidable opposition. We are not only interested and charmed by the scenes that open out before us, page after page—such as "the triumph of defeat, the blessing of sorrow, the might of pain, the glory of submission," as Father Faber puts it —but we are filled with admiring wonder as we contemplate grace triumphing over nature, and spirit over matter, and weakness made unconquerable through the protection of omnipotence; and, what is yet more important, we feel that the very same weapons that won the battles of the saints lie ready to our hand, and well within our reach, and that even now God's arms are not shortened.

And what adds immensely to our zest is the fact that, in contemplating the saints, we are contemplating men and women like ourselves. Their nature is the same as ours, and their innate strength no greater than our own. If they

wrestled successfully with evil, if they beat down every rebellious passion and passed in safety through fire and water, it was not because they were formed from a different clay, but because they had learned the value of prayer and had trusted in God and not in themselves. For the rest, they were human as we are. They were, naturally, as sensible to the seductions of the world; pleasure and comfort and ease appealed to them just as such things appeal to us; they were as open to external influences, and could revel in love and beauty and luxury as others can. If they mastered these feelings and resisted these attractions, it was not because they were insensible to their fascination, but because they were careful to bring themselves under other and nobler influences; and they learned at last so to relish spiritual things as to despise worldly goods, for the fairest and most enticing joys of earth fall flat and taste insipid to one who has once experienced the least of the supernal joys of heaven. Just as time, however long, looks short when viewed in the light of eternity, so worldly gains seem losses rather than gains when placed beside those of our home above.

We possess the same graces as the saints did, so it only rests with us to make as good a use of

them. They teach us how to fight, and how to train ourselves for victory. Is there a single advantage they can claim which we also do not enjoy? Their surroundings were often far more difficult and trying than our own. Yet they stand out before us, champions of the faith and giants of virtue, as though they would show us that, if we are the poor craven creatures that we prove ourselves to be, it is only too often *because we have not the courage or the ambition to be better.*

The study of the lives of the saints also serves another very important purpose: it teaches us to know ourselves and to judge more accurately of our own dispositions and character. We scarcely ever form a just estimate of our own spiritual state, and this is mainly because we scarcely ever set before us an accurate standard. We are disposed, even unconsciously, to overrate our virtue, and we encourage this inclination by a thousand subtle insincerities.

One of the worst is the habit we have of comparing ourselves (often inadvertently) with those who are on a much lower level. A man with but one eye is a hero in the company of the blind, and the most imperfect babbler may think himself eloquent in the land of the dumb. In a similar way, a priest who leads the most ordi-

nary life, will seem a hero of sanctity if compared with men of dissolute habits, and will be sure to regard himself with some complacency if he allows himself to think only of the worldly and the profligate. It is quite easy to form an exalted opinion of one's own spiritual condition and to rest satisfied with oneself, if one never contemplates one's portrait except in juxtaposition with the very worst specimens of sinful humanity as its permanent background. Yet this is generally what happens with most of us.

The daily press chronicles all that is most evil in the lives of men. It reports murders and suicides and unnatural crime. It tells us of drunkenness, of theft, of arson and embezzlements. It describes the cruelties that are practised by husbands on their wives and by parents on their children; it speaks of unhappy unions, followed by public trials and divorce; it shows how men will take mean advantage of one another, and will cheat, embezzle and thieve, and overreach one another in business; it tells us of quarrels and fights and acts of vengeance, of anger, hatred and ill-will. In short, it stirs up the cesspools of moral filth that lie contaminating almost every great city, and brings the worst to the surface for our inspection. It draws aside the veil that hides the very lowest and the most

degraded sections of society, and exposes its festering wounds and running sores to view.

It is impossible to shut our eyes or to close our ears to all this, for it is thrust upon our attention in too graphic a manner and in too many different ways. But what is the result? The result is that our opinion of the world grows darker and more severe, while *pari passu* our opinion of ourselves becomes, in the same measure and by comparison, more favorable and lenient. When contrasted with these enormities, our own faults look light and insignificant, or are regarded as scarcely faults at all. Our consciousness of freedom from the atrocious crimes that are committed all around us seems to absolve us from all guilt, and we scarcely blush at our own blemishes and infidelities. Indeed, against so dark a background our own lives look positively innocent, good, and almost saintly; thus, the sorrow and shame that we should have for our own personal sins are swallowed up by our indignation and horror at the crimes and enormities of others.

This effect is natural—yes, alas! far *too natural*—and is produced in us almost unconsciously. But this fact should urge us all the more strongly to cast about for some remedy, for we are really deceiving ourselves and living

in a fool's paradise, and it is imperative that we should arouse ourselves from so perilous a dream.

But how is this to be accomplished? The answer is simple. By putting the examples of real Christian virtue before us, and by living (in thought) with the most perfect and the most heroic imitators of Christ rather than with the riffraff of mankind. The lives of the saints will teach us many valuable lessons, and are calculated to enforce truths which might otherwise easily pass unnoticed and escape observation. Above all, they will enable us to distinguish the true from the false, and to recognize real heroism from its counterfeit. They will present us with a juster standard of virtue, and put within our reach the means of weighing our actions and determining the value or the worthlessness of our own line of conduct.

When we compare ourselves with worldly-minded persons—with men and women who have never had the golden opportunities that have lain in our way, nor the special graces and blessings that have guarded us safely through the labyrinth of temptation and trial—we are too apt to flatter ourselves that all is well, to feel complacency in our own good deeds, and, as the Scripture puts it, "to imagine ourselves

to be something, whereas we are nothing." We are weak and blind and so stimulated by pride and self-love that we instinctively exaggerate whatever is to our credit. The slightest favor conferred upon us by God, the least success in our spiritual exercises, or the smallest light in prayer or unction in meditation, we accept as an unmistakable mark of special favor. Our little mortifications, our most trivial acts of penance, our patience under some slight provocation, our resignation under some cross or disappointment, are all carefully considered, and the consideration flatters us and inflates our vanity and conceit.

Then, perhaps, we take up the life of a saint, and so enter upon the path of amendment. As we read on and on, a strange sensation gradually steals over us in spite of ourselves. We begin to entertain doubts concerning our own perfection and to feel decidedly less comfortable. Our virtues grow very dim and feeble, when placed side by side with those of the saint; in fact, they seem to fade quite away, much as the light of a candle or lamp seems to fade when brought out into the bright dazzling sunlight. A true proper sense of our inferiority steals over us. We grow ashamed almost of our very virtues, which now scarcely look like

virtues at all. And thus our knowledge deepens until at last we are led to confess painfully and sorrowfully that we have all along deceived ourselves, and are in sober truth neither humble, nor pure, nor zealous, nor charitable—but only poor and unworthy sinners, loaded with infirmities and full of every imperfection and misery.

By means of studying the lives of the saints and reading their biographies, we grow better acquainted with them; we familiarize ourselves with their ways and doings, and make them in a very true sense our friends and companions. Their example lifts us up into a purer atmosphere, and we soon find ourselves adopting their views and judgments, and looking upon things with their eyes. They teach us to detect our shortcomings; they lay bare our more secret wounds; and they steep us deeper and deeper in humility, which is the very foundation of all the other virtues. This is a very great gain, since, where there is true and solid humility, sanctity cannot be far off.

Furthermore, in spite of the newly acquired sense of our spiritual poverty, weakness and general inferiority, we are happily not crushed nor even dispirited and downcast. Quite the contrary, for an intimate acquaintance with the lives of God's greatest servants greatly con-

tributes to inspire us with confidence. In the saints, the grace of God is so constantly manifested and so wonderfully apparent. We see it literally transforming weak creatures like ourselves. We gaze in admiration at some of the most magnificent and remarkable amongst them. However exalted the heights to which they reached, we call to mind their origin and their history. We see them born in the usual way, of earthly and imperfect parents, inheriting the same corrupt and sinful nature as ourselves, and swayed by the same feelings, inclinations and passions. Before them, as before us, the world spread its subtle snares; the flesh rebelled against the spirit; and the devil sought to entangle them in his meshes, as he seeks to entangle us. In a word, they were but men, with all the weakness and infirmities of men. Yet they triumphed, overcoming every difficulty and treading under foot every obstacle, and lived almost like Angels, though clothed in human flesh. They triumphed, not indeed by virtue of their own strength or by any peculiarity of their physical or mental constitution, but by the power and the influence of God. Grace entered into their hearts, and this grace, fostered and faithfully corresponded with, attracted yet greater graces. And, as the spiritual illuminations of

the Holy Spirit increased, their intellectual vision became clearer and more extended till at length they realized, in a manner given to few, the vanity of all earthly things and the utter nothingness of all that is not God. So wholeheartedly, indeed, did they triumph over the world that they came at last to prefer its enmity to its friendship, its hatred to its flattery; and they rejoiced to be forgotten by it and to live unknown that they might lose themselves more entirely in the contemplation of God and of divine things.

The living spectacle of so much virtue and heroism in members of our own fallen race stirs up hope and a holy resolution within our hearts, so that we are inclined to exclaim with St. Augustine: "Canst not thou also do what these men and women have done?" This is one of the most admirable effects of spiritual reading. Let us develop the idea a little.

There is no doubt but that man is an imitative being, and is stirred to his depths by example. Proofs of this fact are constantly coming under our notice. How many boys have been induced to leave home and run away to sea through reading the glowing accounts of the dangers and adventures of a seafaring life! How many in past times have taken to the road, and turned

bandits and footpads, by reason of the arousing stories they have pored over concerning Robin Hood and Little John, whose example they longed to emulate! The fact is, man is so constituted that he must admire something, and make a hero of somebody. A bold, fearless character arrests our attention, and has an undeniable attraction for us. We admire even mere physical strength and a daring adventuresome spirit; but we are yet more drawn by moral strength, when it is set fairly and clearly before us. A soul that is pure, and noble, and generous excites our admiration. We feel drawn by an almost irresistible force towards one who can be strong as well as pure, and resolute as well as calm, and who like Blessed Thomas More, though true as steel to king and country, is far truer still to God and conscience.

If any human being can awaken in the slothful soul a feeling of enthusiasm, it is the saint; if aught can fan the expiring embers of a languishing piety and kindle it into a flame, it is the example of a true hero; if anything can arouse us to a sense of our misery, and infuse new life and new energy into our lukewarm souls, it is the contemplation of the noble deeds and the heroic achievements and the superhuman courage of the truly great. Unless we are

quite insensible to all appeal, unless our better nature is utterly sodden, dead, and paralyzed by sin and crime, we shall feel the force and attraction of a saintly character. Yes, thank God, in spite of our imperfections we can still admire goodness when we see it. There are chords in our nature that are touched by noble deeds, and that reverberate to every pulsation of a great and magnanimous heart.

To read the lives of the saints, whether confessors or martyrs, is to call forth the best feelings of our nature and to fill us with the noblest of all ambitions—*viz.*, the ambition to rise above the sordid and passing interests of time in order to fix our hearts and all their affections on the only real and sublime things of eternity.

Among so varied and so vast a multitude of saints, every one may always find some especially suited to his individual needs. A soldier will be fired by the example of a St. Sebastian, a bishop by that of a St. Charles Borromeo or a St. Augustine, a king by a St. Louis of France or a St. Edward of England. Yes, mere laborers, servants, and even beggars will find suitable examples of heroic sanctity in such saints as St. Isidore, who tilled the fields, St. Rita, who was a domestic servant, and St. Benedict Jo-

seph Labre, who lived on alms and begged his bread from door to door; while we secular priests will find a vast number of ecclesiastics to choose from, though it must be admitted that the number of *simple secular priests* to be found among the lists of canonized saints is lamentably small. In fact, if we exclude the martyrs, of whom there are a good number, I cannot call to mind more than two simple secular priests who have been raised to our altars. They are St. John Baptist Vianney, the Curé d'Ars, and St. John Baptist de Rossi. Perhaps some of my readers may remember others, but these are the only two names of ordinary members of the secular clergy that occur to my mind at the present moment.

Now, considering the immense number of secular priests who have lived and died since the first establishment of Christianity, it does seem strange that the number (I will not say of saints, but) of canonized saints among them should be so few. But there is an explanation. The fact is that those of their number who manifested heroic sanctity were soon withdrawn from the ranks, and selected as Bishops, Archbishops, or Popes, or else they became founders of Religious Orders or Congregations, and were in consequence no longer reckoned among the

simple secular priests.[1] But a saint will be an example for us in whatever position he may be in. We may learn valuable lessons from them all, whether priests or laymen. They will teach us the true way of perfection, and help us by their example to overcome nature, to correspond with God's grace, and to secure for ourselves eternal life and heavenly joys.

In conclusion then, let us confess that, if we do not become saints with all these splendid examples to encourage and to inspire us, we must

[1] "Another reason," writes Cardinal Herbert Vaughan, "is that the lives of the secular clergy, as a rule, are much more isolated than those of the members of religious Orders. . . . In a religious Order everything that is remarkable is chronicled and treasured up: the lives of its heroes are written with every care; and there is a large and undying body of men interested—and very justly interested—in upholding the splendid examples which their holy brethren have given to the world. . . . No such records could be produced of the lives of the secular clergy for the simple reason that the secular clergy have never had the custom of drawing up a chronicle of the lives of their brethren. . . . In addition to this, the very process of canonization is difficult and expensive. It is carried through many generations, sometimes through a century or two. The promotion of a cause is taken up more easily by a compact body, having widespread relations, than by isolated members of the secular clergy. As to its cost, it is related that, while the Gonzaga family rejoiced in having one of their members raised to the dignity of the altar, they used playfully to remark that the canonization of a second would be the ruin of the family" (cfr. Cardinal Vaughan's *Introduction* to the "Life of St. John Baptist de Rossi," translated from the Italian by Lady Herbert, pp. xvii-xviii). The Cardinal says much more on the same subject, but those interested must consult the *Introduction* for themselves.

be made of very inferior clay, and be singularly wanting in true zeal and in that insatiable hunger for "the better things" which characterized the saints, and led them on "from virtue to virtue" till they seemed, at last, rather angels than men. In his "Psychology of the Saints" (p. 24), Père Joly tells us that "the Church has canonized not only monks and nuns side by side with dukes, duchesses, kings, queens, emperors and empresses, but also merchants, schoolmasters, gardeners, workmen, shepherds and shepherdesses, lawyers, doctors, publicans, retired executioners, tailors, treasurers, magistrates, beggars, domestic servants, artisans, shoemakers, carpenters, blacksmiths and fishermen." In a word, we see before us men and women, upon whom the obligation of becoming holy does not press with anything like the weight with which it presses upon us priests, reaching the highest pinnacles of sanctity, while we are still at the very foot of the ladder of perfection, so faint and unworthy are our efforts. And what is possibly yet more shameful, we find men and women who have not a hundredth part of our advantages and helps and graces and opportunities, surpassing us in virtue and leaving us a thousand miles behind them in the exercise of every good work. Just think of it! These

shoemakers, tailors, carpenters and others mentioned above have been solemnly and authoritatively declared by the infallible Church to have exercised heroic virtue and to be so exalted in the sight of God by reason of their saintly lives as to be placed before us as models and examples, and to be raised to our altars for the veneration of the faithful; whereas we, chosen ministers of God, sharers in the Priesthood of Christ Himself, ever engaged about His altar, and daily offering up the adorable Sacrifice, can lay no claim whatsoever to heroic virtue, and are almost as far removed from their exalted and extraordinary sanctity as the East is from the West.

In short, without our special gifts, *they* have surpassed us! With fewer opportunities, they have secured a vastly greater success. Without the many extraordinary advantages peculiar to our exalted state, they have raised themselves immeasurably above us. With far less means at their disposal, they have achieved far greater results, and, though handicapped in a hundred ways, *they* have won the race and reached the winning-post, while *we* are still lagging a great distance behind.

What a lesson these undeniable facts should teach us! Especially what shame and grief we

should feel at our having made so little headway! We who ought to have gone before and to have led, are yet so far in the rear. These lay folk have put us clerics to shame. On the other hand, we must acknowledge that it is all our own fault. If others without our special graces can triumph so gloriously, we can surely do as much and yet more, if only we strive more valiantly. What we are wanting in is, not the means but the ambition, not the opportunity but the determined will to make use of it, not the graces and the divine helps but the strong resolution to avail ourselves of them. This is clearly proved by the striking example of so many, less favored than ourselves, who are now numbered among the canonized Saints of God.

Let us then humble ourselves in the sight of God, and resolve to conquer our sloth and pusillanimity and labor in downright earnestness in the service of our Divine Master, realizing that our advance will be in proportion to the efforts we make. St. Teresa observes that, whatever virtues may be more necessary for others, courage is the most essential for those who are aiming at perfection.

CHAPTER XX

THE PASTORAL OFFICE: THE SICK AND THE DYING

"The prayer of faith shall save the sick man" (James, v. 15).

A GENUINE parish-priest will feel a true and practical interest in every soul committed to his care. Whether saint or sinner, every member of his flock has a right to expect the priest to show a kindly solicitude for his spiritual welfare and an eagerness to help him in his need. But, of all his spiritual children there are none for whom he should show so great and so personal an anxiety as for the sick and the dying.

Instead of waiting till he is summoned to the bedside of a suffering man or woman, he should form a habit of inquiring for and discovering for himself, as he goes his rounds, those who are ill and in need of his services. This is not only an act of true kindness and charity to the invalids themselves, but it will save the hard-worked pastor many a trying sick-call in the

dead of night, when he ought to be taking his sorely needed rest. Indeed, by a zealous attention to this practice, many a priest is able to escape almost all disturbance during the hours assigned to sleep.

But, besides being a wise and prudent precaution, it is prescribed by the Ritual: *Cum primum noverit quempiam ex fidelibus curæ suæ commissis ægrotare, non expectabit ut ad eum vocetur sed ultro ad illum accedat.*

The reason the Church attaches such importance to this is, no doubt, because the eternal future of a soul depends *entirely* upon the manner in which it departs from this world. We have but to picture the scene in order to grasp its immense significance.

Here lies a man weak and suffering, about to render up his soul to God. Heaven and hell are quivering in the balance. The greatest crisis of his life, the one moment upon which his whole eternity depends, is near. How is it all going to end? The evil spirits who have tempted him successfully or unsuccessfully during his life, are fully aware that his soul is theirs, if only they can secure his dying in sin. Temptations, no doubt, are to be feared *at all times,* for "man's life upon earth is a warfare" (Job, vii. 1), but they are far more terrible *at its*

close. For then will the devil "come down, having great wrath, knowing that he hath but a short time" (Apoc., xii. 12). The pastor will therefore look upon it as a most sacred duty to hasten to the assistance of the poor soul in its direst need, and to safeguard, to the best of his power, its happy entry into the next world.

In order to ensure the best possible results at the hour of death, the zealous pastor should make a point of explaining to his flock, from time to time, the meaning and the effects of the last rites. He should point out to them how our Blessed Lord has most mercifully provided special helps and graces at every great crisis of our earthly lives, and inspire in them a longing for the great Sacrament of Extreme Unction, as soon as they are conscious of any serious illness. He should lay special stress on the importance of sending for the priest before all hope of recovery has passed, because one of the effects of this Sacrament is to restore health, when God sees it to be expedient, but this restoration to health is *not by way of a miracle,* but by way of rendering ordinary means efficacious. "For although bodily cure is effected by the sacrament through a supernatural virtue, it is nevertheless not miraculous, since it is accomplished by ordinary soothing operation, just as

natural medicines are wont to act" (Schouppe, II, p. 739).

The people should be instructed how to prepare for this Sacrament, and should be taught, while in full vigor of health, to realize its chief effects, especially its power to wash away lesser sins, as well as the languor and infirmity produced by sin. They should be reminded, further, that it supplies the dying with strength to enable them to resist the force and violence of the devil, and to withstand victoriously all his wiles and stratagems.

Frequently it happens that the dying are inspired by great fear, and are full of agitation and distress. When this is the case, let us remember that nothing so conduces to restore tranquillity and to cast off sadness as the devout reception of this Sacrament. Again and again I have witnessed wonderful changes take place. Those who before the reception of Extreme Unction were painfully full of fear and dread, have not only awaited peacefully and calmly the coming of the Almighty Judge as soon as they have been refreshed with the Sacrament, but, free from all anxiety, they have been filled with pious joy and gladness at His approach.

What every one who is dangerously ill and on the point of death desires is surely only one

of two things, either to be restored to health or to die a holy death. Now, either one or other of these is *infallibly obtained* by all those who receive Extreme Unction with the requisite dispositions. Let us then exhort our people to avail themselves of such an admirable gift of God, and to pray during life that they may not be deprived of the Last Sacraments at the hour of death. To give our people a clear idea of the Last Sacraments and their purpose and effects, and to inspire them with a keen sense of their immense importance, will add greatly to the ease and the efficacy of our ministrations when we are actually called to attend them when stretched on a bed of suffering. When that hour actually arrives, we should be there ready and anxious to frustrate all the devil's malicious attempts to take possession of the poor languishing soul. "We are, venerable brethren," writes Bishop Moriarty to his priests, "the appointed sentinels of the death-bed. It is ours to see that all is right with the immortal soul before it is launched into eternity. Remember that it will have then escaped from our hands and from our keeping. If a mistake is made, if there be one grave omission, we can never recall the soul, we can never repair the loss. That tremendous obligation, therefore, *surpassing all others,*

which binds man to secure for himself a death in the grace of God, binds us, as the agents and appointed ministers of this work, to secure such a death for every one committed to our care. . . . You observe through the whole course of moral theology that, when there is question of undefined obligations, no laxity or delay is tolerated *in articulo mortis*. No duty must be left undischarged. Probability is then flung to the winds. *In articulo mortis* everything must be done to make eternal election *certain*" ("Allocutions to the Clergy," p. 130).

The presence of a zealous priest at the bedside of the dying will not only bring great comfort and consolation, but will frequently mean the actual salvation of a soul in imminent peril. Though we may often and rightly warn our flock against the folly of relying upon a deathbed repentance, yet there is no doubt but that the approach of death will often dispose a man to listen to us and to receive our administrations, when nothing else will.

It frequently happens that sinners, who have been too proud and supercilious to hearken to the admonitions and warnings of a priest while in health, are brought low by the humiliation of sickness, and then need only the opportunity in order to confess their sins. So, too, the burning

anger and strong vindictiveness which rage like an unholy fire in the hearts of others, often lose their force and are soothed and calmed by the approach of death, so that they will forgive and be reconciled. Even those who have persevered for years in sensual excesses, and whom it has been impossible to win over to a life of purity and honesty, are often so affected and impressed by the consciousness of their approaching dissolution that they are easily persuaded to dispose themselves for absolution. And faith, too, or other virtues which may have been for long ineffectual, often resume their empire, and revive and are strengthened in the departing soul by reason of its more vivid apprehension of the invisible world into which it feels it is so soon to enter. In short, *whatever may be the cause* —whether from the terrors of the grave, from the weakness of sinking nature, from the earnest prayers of relatives and friends, from past and maybe forgotten merit, or from the pure mercy of God, and the loving solicitude and intervention of His most compassionate Mother—*there is no doubt but that a man's last hours are frequently the period of a last special grace.* The earnest exhortation of the priest, his ardent prayer beside the languishing soul, his readiness to confer the last rites, etc., may be, and no

doubt are in many cases, the only grace now wanting to complete the work of conversion, to rescue an immortal soul from the devil's grasp, and to send it amidst the triumph and jubilee of angels to the bosom of God. Just reflect what any negligence on our part may mean! Consider how the eternal happiness or the eternal misery of a fellow-creature may depend upon our greater or less zeal in coming immediately to his aid. If, through any fault of ours, a single soul should be deprived of the beatific vision of God, and should suffer for all eternity the excruciating agonies of hell, how should we ever forgive ourselves! The longest life would be too short to do penance for our guilt, and not ordinary tears, but tears of blood, would be needed to deplore so measureless a calamity. But, "if," says the author of "Enchiridion Clericorum," "on the one hand, we should be terrified at the thought of a single soul being lost through our fault, let us, on the other hand, aspire to the happiness of being escorted before the throne of God, when our turn comes, by the numbers that we shall have snatched out of the lion's mouth to claim for us the joyous blessing: *Euge, serve bone et fidelis, super multa te constituam, intra in gaudium Domini tui.*"

Our promptitude in bringing the Blessed Eu-

charist to the dying as Viaticum, will be much appreciated by those whose faith is strong. They will realize the immense honor and advantage of having Jesus Christ visit them in Person at that moment of bitterest anguish, for to Him alone can they look for alleviation of their pain and for the grace of patience, fortitude, resignation and loving confidence. "The Lord is my helper, and I will despise my enemies" (Ps., cxvii. 7). And, most important of all, to Him must they look for the crowning grace of final perseverance, of which the Eucharist is the most certain pledge, for it is the pledge of Eternal Life: "He that eateth My Flesh and drinketh My Blood hath everlasting life: and I will raise him up in the last day" (John, vi. 55).

We should also, of course, use every endeavor to inspire the dying with suitable sentiments of faith, hope, charity and contrition. Nothing so helps to foster these dispositions as the thought of the sufferings and bitter Passion of Christ. His immense love, His readiness to suffer the most ignominious and painful death of the Cross in order to save us, sinners, from the consequences of our crimes, should be suggested especially in cases where we are dealing with those whose lives have been wicked. To

remind them that one tiny drop of our Lord's Sacred Blood would have been more than enough to cancel the sins of a thousand worlds, and that yet He shed the whole of it for them personally, so that each may exclaim, as truly as St. Paul himself: "He loved *me* and delivered Himself for *me*" (Gal., ii. 20)—this reminder will generally touch their hearts and fill them with hearty contrition, with a strong and personal love of Jesus Christ, as well as with perfect resignation to His adorable will. This is of the utmost importance, as it will secure for them marvelous blessings. So great an authority as the famous Abbot Blosius assures us in his "Book of Spiritual Instruction," that "no exercise can be more useful in our last hour than to resign ourselves utterly to the Will of God, and to seek nothing of our own, but only the Will of God, in time and eternity. For it is certain," he says, "that any one who goes out of this world in this state of pure and perfect resignation, will fly immediately to the kingdom of heaven. For, as no kind of pain and no burning of the fire of purgatory can affect God, so neither can it affect a man who is perfectly united to God in conformity of will and love. . . . *If he can really do this,* I say, he will not undergo the pains of hell or purgatory, no, not

even if he himself had committed all the sins of the whole world" (pp. 142-144).

We may also observe here that it is well for the zealous pastor to see that, for their consolation and encouragement, the dying have a nice crucifix or picture of Christ on the Cross placed somewhere conveniently, where their eyes can fall upon it while their lives are drawing to a close. Many priests keep a crucifix or two for the express purpose of lending to the sick, so that it may always be contemplated and looked at by them, until they have either recovered health, or else departed this life. We have not thought it necessary to speak of the Last Blessing, the use of Holy Water, indulgenced prayers, and those many lesser helps to a death precious in God's sight, but this is not because we do not attach the greatest possible value to them, but because we take it for granted that the zealous priest will be careful to *omit nothing* that can be of any service to one trembling on the very verge of eternity, and just about to deliver up his soul before the Supreme Judge of the living and the dead, to receive the solemn and irrevocable sentence which will determine his fate for evermore.

Spiritual writers tell us that the two temptations most to be feared in death, and most fre-

quently met with, are either despair or presumption, but my experience does not bear out the assertion. The great majority of Catholics, especially the poor and laboring classes, seem to be particularly ready to welcome the priest and to avail themselves of his ministrations. I can recall but one case of what I supposed must be described as "presumption," and that was not the case of one who had been exceptionally virtuous and holy, but quite the contrary. It was the case of a profligate woman, who was well known to the neighborhood as "a thoroughly bad character." She knew that she was dying, but absolutely refused to make any confession. When I spoke of the infinite goodness of God and His readiness to pardon her all her sins, she replied that she knew that very well, but that He would forgive her all without expecting her to make a confession. After speaking at some length of her obligations to accept His easy conditions of forgiveness, and urging her with all possible patience and gentleness to acknowledge her guilt to the duly appointed minister of God, who would absolve her in God's name, she still refused with the greatest obstinacy. At last, I felt that the only thing to do was to use threats, and to warn her of the appalling judgment she was calling down upon herself. But she re-

mained utterly unmoved. I said that God was just as well as merciful, and would punish her for refusing His simple yet efficacious remedy for sin: the Sacrament of Penance. I declared that He would, on seeing all the crimes staining her soul, be exceedingly angry, and would say: "Depart from Me, you cursed, into everlasting fire." "No," she replied, "He is not that kind of person at all. He would never be so cruel. God is too good to do me any harm. He would never condemn a poor old woman like me." And so she continued to the end, presuming on the mercy of God while all the time refusing to obey His ordinance and to submit to a humble confession. She seemed to be possessed by a dumb-devil, and to be wholly under his power. But this was the solitary instance of presumption that I ever met with, and I hoped I should never have to deal with another.

Besides doing all he can for the dying, a priest ought to draw from the death-beds which he attends many a salutary lesson for his own personal application. The natural effect of attending constantly upon the sick and the dying is to cause us to attach less and less importance to that last journey, and to dismiss the thought as of little interest. But such a tendency should be overcome and resisted. Indeed, a wise pas-

tor will never assist at the bed of a dying man without thinking of his own last end. He will call to mind that life is also passing for him. He will look upon each death which he witnesses as a warning for himself to get ready. He will realize by the examples that come before him how short and uncertain is life; how passing are life's pleasures and pains, and how utterly foolish it is to attach any importance whatsoever to things that perish and dissolve like a dream as soon as the Angel of Death comes to summon the dreamer to the dread realities of one's only true and eternal life. In short, each of those whom he has ushered into eternity will seem to say to him: "Today me, tomorrow thee"; and he will think of and prepare for his own summons, for, as the wise man says: "Meditate on eternity, and you will live for eternity."

As for the practical details of what should be done for the sick and dying, we cannot do better than study carefully and again and again the admirable instructions which every priest will easily find ready to hand in the Roman Ritual, especially the Chapters, *De communione infirmorum, De sacramento extremæ unctionis, De visitatione et cura infirmorum, Modus juvandi morientes, Ordo commendationis animæ,* and *In expiratione.* Every priest who has to

do with the sick and dying, should make himself quite familiar with the contents of these most important and suggestive chapters, as well as with the last chapter of the "Praxis Confessarii" of St. Alphonsus Liguori entitled *Brevis praxis assistendi infirmos,* of which no zealous priest can afford to be ignorant.

Let us then, in conclusion, Reverend Brethren, resolve to be exceedingly diligent and painstaking in our care for the sick and dying, and take to heart the question put by Rev. M. Muller, C.SS.R.: "Who knows if sudden death and privation of the Last Sacraments may not be for many priests the punishment reserved, in the judgment of God. for lack of zeal in attending the sick?"

We should, in any case, so act as not to expose ourselves to so terrible a risk.

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